

# **Freud and Lacan** **on fetishism and masochism/sadism** **as paradigms of perversion**

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## Abstract

We investigate how Lacan abstracts Freud's conceptualization of perversion into a generic theory about the perverse subject structure. By focusing on the subject in perversion, we aim to provide an alternative to the dominant discourse on perversion as exemplified by the DSM V, which focuses on perverse traits and perverse behavior.

Our method consists of a conceptual study and close-readings of the relevant passages from the works of both authors, supplemented with secondary sources from the Freudian and Lacanian field.

Where Freud's views on fetishism and masochism/sadism start from a physiology-based drift theory and are tainted by a phenomenological approach to these perversions, Lacan analyzes perversion as the subject structure in which the subject deals with 'jouissance' by trying to fill the lack in the Other with its own lack.

We discuss also how Freud's and Lacan's preoccupation with perversion is inextricably interwoven with the development of their theories about the psyche in general. For Freud, the study of the masochistic and sadistic drives leads to the discovery of the death drive. For Lacan, the articulation of fetishism with lack in the form of privation, leads to the refinement of his vision of the split subject, while the analysis of masochism and sadism lead him to conceptualize the object *a*, the lacking Other and jouissance.



# Introduction

Within the field of psychoanalysis, there is quite a large body of work about different forms of neurosis and psychosis. While some authors, like Miller, Nobus, Swales and Fink, do publish on perversion within the field of psychoanalysis, it remains a dark continent. Within this field, we will try to bring a renewed reading of Freud's and Lacan's key texts on perversion.

The object of this doctoral dissertation consists in studying Freud's and Lacan's theoretical views on fetishism and masochism/sadism, and in studying how both perversions crystalize, in different moments of their oeuvre, into paradigms with which to think perversion in general.

Our research question is the following: How do Freud and Lacan conceptualize fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions? And, more specifically: How do Freud's theories of fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions evolve in dialogue with three of his most central theoretical constructs: polymorphously perverse infantile sexuality, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus and the death drive? How do Lacan's views of the same crystalize out of the dialectics between perversion and the concepts of lack, the object *a*, the Other and *jouissance*?

Two broad ideas guide our research. First, we examine and explore how Lacan abstracts and develops Freud's conceptualization of perversion into a clear, structural theory of the subject of perversion. Secondly, we analyze how Freud's and Lacan's preoccupation with perversion is intimately intertwined with the development of their respective theories of the psyche in general, such that important parts of their theories of the psyche see the light as a consequence of their struggle with perversion and that conceptual

breakthroughs in their general theories often allow them to re-think perversion in a fruitful manner.

For Freud, we examine how his theories of fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions articulate around three of his central theoretical constructs: infantile polymorphously perverse sexuality, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus and the death drive. Concerning Lacan, we study how his view of these paradigmatic perversions forms a dialectic with the concepts object *a*, the Other and *jouissance*.

When mentioning the subject of perversion, we refer to the Lacanian concept of the subject. This is a complicated construct. Three levels in the development of this construct can be distinguished in Lacan's teachings.

Firstly, Lacan sees the subject as a *hypokeimenon*,<sup>1</sup> literally as that what 'underlies' or is 'thrown under' discourse. It is defined as an effect of relations between signifiers: "The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers," Lacan says (1972, pp. 49-50).<sup>2</sup> As such, the subject is determined by the symbolic order, which Lacan alternatively calls the Other: "The subject is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to the field of the Other" (1955, p. 188).

Secondly, Lacan defines the subject also in terms of a negative relationship with a new kind of object. This object is initially defined as a lack: "The object is constituted by a failing attempt to find back the original object lost at the first weaning. The result is that the subject is always characterized by a lack, and that there is no such thing as an object that can fill this lack" (1956, p. 15). The subject, in other words, is that what bears, what is subjected to and constituted by this lack. Later, Lacan will call this lack the object *a*, and will conceptualize the relationship of the subject to the object *a* as the fundamental phantasm.

But there is also a third level in this conceptualization of the subject – a level beyond the subject, in Lacan's last teaching. There, the speaking being ("parlêtre"), the carnal being as ravaged by the real aspect of language, takes the place of the subject. It is defined not by its relation to the Other or the object but by a knotting of the symbolic, imaginary and real registers (1974; 1975).

We limit ourselves almost exclusively to the first two conceptions of the subject as they take form in Lacan's work up to Seminar XI (1964), because Lacan discusses perversion most explicitly in this period of his oeuvre.

In Lacan's theory, the subject as determined by its relationship to the signifier and to the lacking object is conceptualized in terms of three mutually exclusive subjective positions or clinical structures (Parker, 2011). We use the term position in the literal, mathematical sense: as the relative location of an element respective to other elements. As such, a subjective position is characterized by a specific relationship with the object *a* (1964, p. 87) and with the Other (1964, p. 183). The three clinical structures are neurosis, perversion and psychosis. They are best understood when seen as different relationships of the subject with the lack-of-being. Lacan describes these relationships using Freud's terms *Verneinung*, *Verleugnung* and *Verwerfung*, which he translates respectively as denial, disavowal and foreclosure (Evans, 1996, pp. 195-197). In neurosis, the subject is determined by denial of lack, while the psychotic subject – because it forecloses the Name-of-the-Father – does not have a relation to lack.<sup>3</sup> The third possibility is for the subject to disavow lack. This is characteristic for the subject of perversion, the object of our doctoral dissertation.<sup>4</sup>

This focus on the subject of perversion allows us to distinguish between the subject of perversion on the one hand and perverse traits or symptoms on the other hand (Verhaeghe, 2001a; 2001b). The latter are often characteristic for the former, but can also be found in the subject structures of neurosis and psychosis, and are as such not the direct object of our study. We aim at a structural description of the subject of perversion, not at a phenomenology of perversion. The study of the subject of perversion does thus not pose the question of desirability, normality or sanity. As Lacan puts it: "What is perversion? It is not simply an aberration in relation to social criteria, an anomaly contrary to good morals, although this register is not absent, nor is it an atypicality according to natural criteria, namely that it more or less derogates from the reproductive finality of the sexual union. It is something else in its very structure" (Lacan, 1964, p. 221).

This approach, which puts the subject central, differs radically from the nowadays paradigmatic way to think the problem of perversion. To be more precise, contemporary discourse, as exemplified by the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), doesn't speak about perversion as a subjective structure, but about paraphilic disorders, which is a radically different concept. By treating paraphilias merely as deviations, contemporary discourse often focuses exclusively on undesirable behavior or perverse traits and as such inherently omits the question of the structure and of the subject of perversion.

For Freud, perversion is initially a question of partial drives that fail to be harmonized into normal adult sexuality. Perversion, as he puts it, is the remnant of a failing Oedipus. Looking at this failure through the lens of fetishism, he attributes it to the uncanny perception of the absence of the missing female phallus and the ensuing disavowal of castration. But when he uses masochism/sadism as the paradigm to explain the failure to harmonize the partial drives, it is the deadly character of the masochistic and sadistic drives that will be held responsible.

One cannot read Lacan without keeping in mind that he proposes a "return to Freud" (cf. Lacan, 1966, pp. 197-268). In Freud's wake, Lacan initially sees perversion as a clinical structure in which lack – and castration, and the division of the subject, which are partially overlapping concepts – is disavowed by the subject. But Lacan's analysis goes deeper. Disavowing lack, the subject finds itself in the position of object of the drive, or, to use Lacan's terminology, as the object *a*, cause of the jouissance of the Other. One could alternatively say that the subject is identified with the object *a*, but by using the locution "to find oneself in the position of...", we accentuate the structural connotation (i.e. "What is the relation between the subject, the Other and the object *a*"?) more than the genealogical connotation (i.e. "What happened to the subject for it to be in such a relation to the Other and to the object *a*"?). This choice has the added benefit of avoiding the difficulties inherent to the Lacanian concept of identification, of which the significance changes during the course of his teaching, but is not of major importance to our argument.



For Lacan, the main qualities of the subject structure of perversion are most apparent in two kinds of perversion, in fine structurally equal, but with different accents: fetishism on the one hand, sadism and masochism on the other hand. The disavowal of lack is clearest in fetishism, while in sadism and masochism, the accent lies on the subject's position as object *a* that must complete the Other by provoking its jouissance (1962, pp. 114-115; pp. 123-124). Given the centrality of the concepts lack, object *a*, the Other and jouissance in Lacan's oeuvre, it is no surprise that he thinks the subject of perversion mainly in terms of these four key concepts. In line with the temporality of Lacan's work, we first focus on fetishism, and secondly on sadism and masochism. Other perversions, such as exhibitionism/voyeurism, perverse homosexuality, pedophilia and others, are now and then addressed by both Lacan and Freud, but their handling of these topics does not teach us much about perversion in general. Accordingly, they are not the primary focus of this study.

It is also important to state that in this dissertation, we exclusively focus on male perversion. While neither Freud nor Lacan entirely negate the existence of female perversion, it is an altogether different affair. As Verhaeghe (2001a, p. 85) aptly puts it: "Masculine perversion is explicitly a phallic perversion; female perversion is different, because of woman's different stance towards the phallic signifier". Moreover, whenever Freud or Lacan speak about female perversion, it is on the basis of or in contrast to male perversion.

However, both authors study both perversions not only as paradigms that enable them to understand the subject of perversion. As said, the "riddles" of fetishism and of masochism/sadism also play a determining role in the development of their theories of the subject in general. It opens ways of thinking the subject's position in relation to the drive – which Freud did in terms of the death drive, and Lacan in terms of jouissance –, and, on that basis, an opportunity to rethink the object in relation to the subject – as always already missing, like Freud did, or as object *a*, like Lacan.

The sources for both author's theories about perversion are different. While Freud starts from the texts of the early sexologists and from his own clinic, Lacan's main sources for the study of perversion are Freud's texts, supplemented with some key literary texts. In that sense, Lacan's clinic of perversion is mostly a textual one.

The impact of the study of perversion on the theory of the psyche in general and vice versa is, as stated, one of the two broad ideas that guide our research. This is the main reason why we opt to study the context and the conditions of possibility of Freud's and Lacan's theory of perversion in depth. Now and then, this will lead us to dwell for quite a while on topics and concepts that might not seem directly relevant to the study of perversion at first sight. It is our hope that these detours will equip the reader with the necessary tools to come to a broader understanding of the context in which both authors' theories of perversions saw the light – and, most importantly, of the theory itself.

Our dissertation is logically divided in four parts: Freud on fetishism, Lacan on fetishism, Freud on masochism/sadism and Lacan on masochism/sadism. These four parts mirror the key aspects of our research question: How do Freud and Lacan conceptualize fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions? And, more specifically: How do Freud's theories of fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions evolve in dialogue with three of his most central theoretical constructs: polymorphously perverse infantile sexuality, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus and the death drive? How do Lacan's views of the same crystalize out of the dialectics between perversion and the concepts of lack, the object *a*, the Other and *jouissance*?

We address these questions through a conceptual study in which the oeuvres of Freud and Lacan are examined in detail. We primarily focus on a close reading of key texts by Freud and Lacan that deal directly with the main topic of our dissertation, but also on some of their texts that provide the conceptual framework that enables the reader to follow the evolution of the authors' thoughts on the subject. Secondly, we turn, whenever appropriate, to secondary sources that offer other (close) readings of the texts we deal with. However, while the secondary sources on perversion, Freud and Lacan are

numerous, only very few of these directly deal with both a close reading of the texts we focus on and with the topic of perversion. Where suitable, we open a dialogue with these text in order to position our reading clearly within the field of Freudian and Lacanian studies.

Below, we give a brief overview of the four parts of our dissertation.

## Freud and fetishism

Freud's early thoughts on fetishism are heavily indebted to Charcot, Binet and Krafft-Ebing. These authors claim that in 'normal love', one finds fetishistic aspects or traits, which are however harmoniously ordered and lead to 'normal' sexual intercourse. Therefore, the behavior of the fetishist can't be withheld as the distinctive criterion for fetishism. This criterion lies in a subjective psychical state that finds its roots in an association of the awakening of genital excitation with an exterior fact. This association of ideas crystallizes into a fetish, the early sexologists say, which operates as a sign in a language-based scenario that is instrumental for the regulation of sexual enjoyment in an intense, non-standard way. In fetishists, one can find an ambivalent attitude towards the fetishistic object, and a specific relationship to the law.

While all these elements influenced Freud, his conceptualization of fetishism goes much further. Freud's own ideas on fetishism develop in three phases, in which he gradually shifts focus from the study of the object of fetishism to the study of the subject in fetishism.

In the first period of theorizing about fetishism (around 1900-1905), Freud stays largely tributary to the sexologists, which is most visible in his idea that 'normal', adult sexuality develops out of polymorphous perverse infantile sexuality. But the novel idea of the fetish representing the woman's missing penis, makes here its first appearance. Freud combines it with the idea of a symbolic connection between the fetish and a significant memory from early infancy, which is already to be found in Binet.

In the second period (1905-1920), the concepts of the castration complex and the rejection of the absence of a penis in women play an important role. They are however not yet articulated with the notion of perversion.

In the third and final period, these concepts are articulated with fetishism in two key texts: "Fetishism" (1927e) and "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1940e [1938]). In these papers, Freud crystallizes his theory on the origin of fetishism and enlarges it to perversion in general. Yet, this is not all: Freud also shifts focus from the object of fetishism to the subject in fetishism, whereby he discerns three main characteristics: a specific rift in the ego, a language-based regulatory mechanism of sexual enjoyment, centered on the sign character of the fetish, and a disavowal of sexual differentiation.

With his focus on fetishism, Freud puts his finger on the existence of sexual enjoyment that goes beyond the pleasure-economy. However, it is only when Freud studies sadism and masochism more closely that he comes to conceptualize the death drive to account for this enjoyment. Lacan will further elaborate on this idea of enjoyment beyond pleasure with his concept of *jouissance*.

On the level of the object, Freud takes a first step on the path that will lead Lacan to develop his theory of the object *a*. Freud's discovery concerns here a specific object as the cause of the subject's desire. This specific object is the fetishistic object, which is thought of as instantiation of the missing phallic object, and is marked by a single, frozen sign.

There are some less solid points in Freud's theory. Firstly, Freud never comes up with an explanation of the "why" of the fetishistic "choice", leaving a serious gap in the understanding of fetishism. Secondly, the link between language, sexuality and perversion is pointed out, but remains conceptually underdeveloped. Thirdly, Freud never arrives at a detailed articulation of fetishism in relation to his second, more complex theory of the Oedipus complex. As we show in the second part, Lacan deals with these topics in a more satisfying way.

## Lacan and fetishism

Lacan's main thoughts on fetishism can be found in Seminar IV (1956), where he studies the perverse structure through an analysis of fetishism. This analysis is based on and partly imbedded in his theory of object lack<sup>5</sup>, which we study in detail.

To understand Lacan's theory of object lack, it is necessary to go back to his early text, "The Family Complexes" (1938), where subject development is described as deploying across three complexes: the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex. We will show the parallel with the three moments of object lack: real privation, imaginary frustration and symbolic castration, which we analyze in detail. We confront our interpretations with the readings of Gorog and Chiesa.

It is the development of his object lack theory that allows Lacan to describe fetishism as a specific kind of object relation next to phobia and normality. According to Lacan, fetishism is one of the possible positions of the subject in relation to privation. At one point during development, the subject finds itself in an untenable, anxiety-provoking situation: in the corner of an imaginary triangle of which the other corners are the mother and the phallus. Without the introduction of a paternal fourth term, the only possible 'solution' to this untenable situation consists in 'being' the phallus for the mother, which characterizes perversion.

On the basis of his object lack theory, Lacan elaborates further on fetishism, expanding the Freudian concept of screen memory with the concepts of the veil and its beyond. This allows him to focus on the sign character of the fetish, reminiscent of Freud's 'Glance at the nose'. He thinks of the fetish as a metonymy, in which the value of one signifier is transposed onto another. While the fetish functions as a sign, it has the form of an image, which is like a screen that protects the subject in fetishism from castration anxiety. As image, it is non-dialectic and stays petrified.

We argue that it are the fetishistic object and its beyond, where the fetishist experiences paroxysmal, ahistorical pleasure, that put Lacan on the track of respectively the object *a* and jouissance, two key concepts in his later work. As we show in part 4, it is the elaboration of these two concepts that will allow Lacan to think the relationship between the subject of perversion and its Other – at this stage still the (m)Other – in a more abstract, more generic way: as the relationship where the subject is in the position of trying to supplement to the lack of the Other.

### Freud on sadism and masochism

For Freud, sadism and masochism are crucial concepts that occupy a central place in his theory. The riddle of masochism leads Freud more than once to review his metapsychological theories drastically, and is the main motor for the change between his first and second topologic models of the mental apparatus.

Freud thinks of sadism – and of masochism – mostly as drives, and not as clinical structures. In part 3, we meticulously track the conception of both drives through his work.

In a first moment, stretching roughly from “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900a) to “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), Freud sees sadism as a primary drive and masochism as a (more or less indirect) transformation of it. During that period, both drives emancipate slowly from the sexual drive, gain a more and more independent character, and Freud develops the concept of “admixture” of different drives. In “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c) and in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), Freud’s efforts to elaborate his conceptual apparatus concerning the relationship between sadistic and masochistic drives intensify, but result in a number of aporias. For example, as we will explain, in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), the idea of masochism becomes clearly loaded with an enigmatic character. However, in this text Freud makes a big leap forward: the analysis of the beating phantasm allows him to bring perversion in general in relation

with the incestuous object and as such with the Oedipus complex. A failing Oedipus is here seen as the root of perversion in general.

Only one year later, confronted with the traumatic experiences of soldiers returning from the trenches, Freud comes to read the masochistic drive as characterized by a compulsion to repeat. This leads him in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g) to make a radically new distinction: the distinction between death drive and Eros. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924c), he applies this new insight to masochism in detail. In the time between these two texts, but also after the second of them, some interesting paragraphs on these perversions appear in different off-topic texts. The main point in this second part of Freud’s thinking on sadism and masochism, is the “discovery” of masochism as a primary drive, as an instantiation of – and at the same time paradigmatic model for – the death drive.

We will conclude that there are some lacks in Freud’s theorizing about sadism and masochism, which Lacan will address. Firstly, Freud speaks about sadism and masochism as drives, but almost never reflects on the subject of sadism or masochism. Secondly, it is not clear how Freud thinks the object in this phase of his work. Speaking about the drives, the object seems to be almost absent from his speculations on perversion. Only in his discussion of the phantasm in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), the object is staged, but, as we will argue, poorly.

### Lacan on sadism and masochism

In this part, we focus on Lacan’s theories on sadism and masochism. Because of the complexity of the source material and our choice to study the conditions of possibility of Lacan’s theories on perversion, we analyze the evolution of the central concepts that will allow him to come to a mature theory on sadism and masochism by Seminar X (1962). Accordingly, a first introductory chapter deals with Lacan’s thoughts about sadism and masochism before Seminar VII (1959); the second chapter focuses on Seminar VII itself. The difficult paper “Kant with Sade” (1966) is the subject of the third chapter. These three

chapters function as a preliminary to the fourth chapter, which focuses on Seminar X (1962), and on Lacan's more refined theory of sadism and masochism.

## Before Seminar VII

Before Seminar VII (1959), Lacan speaks about sadism and masochism in different, only loosely connected places. In his search for a differentiation between neurosis and perversion, Lacan tries different approaches, which parallel the overall evolution of his work, with a first phase where he stresses the imaginary order, a second with the accent on the symbolic and a final one where the real plays the key role. As shown above, these phases often intermingle and coincide.

Characteristic for the more imaginary approaches in Lacan's early Seminars, are the repeated use of his 'mirror phase' and, heavily linked to this, his 'intrusion complex' to think perversion – especially when linked to Freud's idea of primary sadism as undifferentiated from primary masochism and to Sartre's concept of the gaze of the other.

These ideas evolve into a more symbolic characterization of primary masochism as a dialectization of primary sadism, a dialectization that Lacan thinks in one place as the link between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, as such generalizing his idea of the fetishistic object as unconscious speech frozen into a sign that we discussed in the part on Lacan and fetishism.

But, alongside these – failing – attempts, more novel ideas surface, which have their importance for Lacan's later theory on perversion. We point out the link with primary masochism and the death drive in the sense of life looking to return to 'the stillness of the stones', the idea that perversion is always intersubjective – even if this intersubjectivity stays here still imaginary –, the idea that the subject takes the position of the object in the phantasm, the idea of the role of an observer, an actor and an object in the perverse



phantasm and, last but not least, the idea of 'an enigmatic, desubjectivated residue', which seems to point towards the object *a* as real.

In his Seminar on desire (1958), Lacan articulates his view on perversion with an important phase of his elaboration of the object *a*, which will lead to a number of new impasses that are, as so often with Lacan, fruitful for his later theory.

The first is Lacan's articulation of desire with the phantasm and the object *a*. In the beginning of the Seminar, he analyzes the object *a* as still imaginary, as based on the image of the other (*i(a)*). We draw attention to the parallel with Lacan's analysis of the fetish-object in Seminar IV (1956). A bit further in the Seminar, Lacan starts to introduce more and more often symbolic elements in his attempts to analyze the object *a*: the signifier, the scenario, the chain and the real deprivation of the symbolic phallus. These attempts culminate temporarily into a formula, defining the object of desire as the signifier of its recognition, and into the idea that in desire, it is about a relationship to the Other.

As we show, some of Lacan's attempts to describe the object *a* go further, and include references to the Real, as in his analysis of the object *a* as being the result of a cut. The object *a* is thought as a remainder, as a pound of flesh, drawn from the body, but also as the interval in the chain of signifiers. It is the ransom the subject pays when confronted with the lack in the Other, with the fact that there is no Other of the Other. It is Lacan's way to generalize the fetishistic object and the partial objects, including the phallus – a necessary generalization to think sadism and masochism.

Without object *a*, we argue, perversion is unthinkable, and vice versa. We show how Lacan tries many a time to come up with a structural distinctive criterion between perversion and neurosis, and fails – fruitfully, once more.

Firstly, Lacan shows how Freud's discovery of perversion – or at least of the infantile polymorphous perverse tendencies – led to his conceptualization of the phantasm. Lacan refers to Freud's account of fetishism, where he finds a sequence or a scenario in what

Freud describes as a screen memory, something that is cut off from consciousness – which seems to lead Lacan to see perversion as prone to psychoanalysis.

Lacan also sees the accent in the perverse phantasm lying on the object *a*, not on the split subject – that Lacan writes as  $\$$ . This will be of crucial importance later.

In passing by, Lacan enumerates some traits proper to perversion: a ridiculous, comic aspect to the phantasm – seen from the neurotic perspective, and the fact that the phantasm of the pervert is spatial – the only *structural* determination he makes about perversion.

In his analysis of scotophilia, Lacan sees the Other as a partner in the perverse phantasm, and speaks of the object *a* as a *trap* for desire, as that what provokes the desire of the Other. At another moment, he speaks of the desire of the Other as being the object *a* as such, and also of the subject in perversion as making up for the lack in the Other. He identifies the object *a* for the scotophilic as the *split*, and sees it as *real*.

When Lacan considers what it would mean for the phantasm to be realized, he speaks of it as a confrontation with the desire of the Other. The result would be the fading of the subject: the kernel of the phantasm is the disappearance of the split, and without a split, without lack, there is no subject. What stays, is desubjectified jouissance.

While these points of view are crucial for his later development, they also lead to impasses and paradoxes. As such, it is not clear if the object *a* is what enables the subject to keep his lack, to keep his distance from the desire of the Other, or if it is, on the contrary, that what the subject has to keep at distance. In the same sense, it is not clear – and this will only become clear in Seminar X (1962) – if the object *a* is the *aim* or the *cause* of desire.

Other interesting ideas surface when Lacan speaks about masochism, which he acknowledges – just like Freud – to be ‘the final enigma’. Once more he analyses Freud’s “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e); this time, he puts the accent on the jouissance of the

subject that lies in the desubjectivation, in the subject taking the object position, the position of being reduced to nothing in the phantasm.

While the cut as object *a*, and as joint between the Symbolic and the Real, could be a very promising tool for an analysis of perversion, Lacan forgoes this opportunity, and opts instead to read the cut in perversion as a split, in the sense of Freud's 'split ego' – which leads Lacan almost at the very end of the Seminar to a description of perversion from an imaginary angle.

It is only in Seminar VII (1959) that the object *a* will appear as real – in the guise of the Thing. It is around this concept of the object *a* as real that much of the loose strands we find before Seminar VII (1959) take their coherence.

## Seminar VII

In his Seminar on the ethics of psycho-analysis (1959), Lacan develops the concept of the Thing. This construct is an instantiation of his concept object *a*, and builds on Freud's death drive. It also sheds light on the concept *jouissance*, which is elaborated in reference to the Law and the Thing, and characterized as an excess of pleasure, clarifying the idea of the possibility of "pleasure in pain", which caused Freud so much conceptual trouble.

It is precisely this concept that will allow Lacan later to think perversion in a truly structural fashion.

Because of the importance of Lacan's complex conceptual developments in this Seminar for the understanding of his later theory on sadism and masochism, we discuss his conceptual elaborations in detail.

But, while complex and granular, at the time of Seminar VII (1959), Lacan's conceptual apparatus is not yet refined enough to allow him to think sadism and masochism in a satisfactory way.

While already in this Seminar, Lacan articulates Kant's second Critique with Sade's "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795), arguing that this text "yields the truth of the Critique"

(1966, p. 646), it will only be with the return to this question in “Kant with Sade” (1966) that Lacan will elaborate what it means to be the subject of the jouissance of the Other.

## Kant with Sade

Two years after the Seminar on ethics, Lacan returns to the same problem with his paper “Kant with Sade” (1966). In this paper, Lacan explores the Sadean maxim and the Sadean phantasm, and articulates the position of the subject of perversion in terms of the relationship with the object *a* and the Other.

Lacan’s formulation and analysis of the Sadean maxim lays the groundwork for his later development of the relationship between the subject in perversion and the Other, and for the interpretation of the relationship between the subject and the Other in general. It is instrumental in trying to detail the complexity of this relationship. For this goal, Lacan uses an array of rich notions, ideas and concepts that we examine in detail: the non-reciprocity of intersubjectivity, the importance of the kerygma, pain as a means to perverse jouissance and, finally, the status of the object of the law. For the study of perversion, the most important notion is certainly that the subject in perversion aims at the Other’s jouissance.

While Lacan’s attempt to clarify the relation between the subject and the Other clearly partly fails, it is a necessary step to come to Lacan’s theory of perversion in Seminar X (1962), where the relationship between the subject in perversion and its Other will find a more stable form.

The same can be said of Lacan’s schema of the Sadean phantasm, for which the analysis of the Sadean maxim paves the way. We analyze its structure, its form and its constituent parts in detail, and comment on Lacan’s use of notions as the cause, the *vel*, the barred and the unbarred subject. The most interesting result of this analysis is the possibility to understand the subject in perversion as a split subject striving for its

reconstitution, through an alienation of its pathos and at the cost of being the instrument of the jouissance of the Other.

It is, however, only on the basis of his ulterior theory concerning the object *a* as object-cause-of-desire that Lacan will be able to think sadism and masochism in a stable way. This happens in the Seminar on anxiety (1962).

## Seminar X

Contra Freud, in Seminar X (1962), Lacan thinks anxiety as a subjective experience that is not without an object. At this point in his work, the notion of the object *a* is clarified, precisely because of the link with the object of anxiety. Where before the object *a* was characterized as the object that is the goal-of-desire, here it unfolds as the object cause-of-desire.

It is in this context of anxiety and the object *a*-cause-of-desire that Lacan can think perversion in terms of the position of the subject in relation to object *a*, the lack of the Other, and jouissance. This is formulated in his model concerning the perverse phantasm, in which the subject of perversion is in the position of the object *a*, supplementing the lack in the Other. This phantasm can be read as an abstraction and further development of Lacan's formula for fetishism, in which the subject in perversion supplements the (m)Other's castration by occupying the position of her phallus.

Lacan (1962, pp. 113-115) distinguishes two figurations of the perverse phantasm: a sadistic and a masochistic one. In masochism, the subject of masochism seems to aim for the jouissance of the Other by presenting himself as object *a* to the Other. But in fact, he aims for the Other's anxiety. In sadism, on the other hand, the subject seems to aim for the anxiety of the Other, but in fact aims for the Other's jouissance.

As such, the Seminar on anxiety not only allows to formulate a theory on sadism and masochism, but also on perversion in general. In an abstract and general manner, perversion can be thought of as the subject structure that deals with jouissance by supplementing the lack in the Other with the subject's own lack.

In the discussion of this dissertation, we refer back to the two main questions underlying our research.

We conclude firstly that Lacan indeed abstracts Freud's conceptualization of perversion into a more generic, truly structural theory. While Freud's views of fetishism and masochism/sadism never entirely leave behind a physiologically based drive-theory and are still tainted by a phenomenological approach of these perversions, Lacan articulates perversion as the subject structure in which the subject is in the position of the object *a*, cause of the jouissance of the Other.

Secondly, we conclude that Freud's and Lacan's preoccupation with perversion are clearly closely linked with the development of their respective theories of the psyche in general. Most importantly for Freud, the study of the masochistic and sadistic drives leads to the discovery of the death drive. For Lacan, the articulation of fetishism with lack in the form of privation leads to the refinement of the concept object *a* and the analysis of masochism and sadism leads him to conceptualize the lack in the Other and jouissance.

## PART 1

### Freud on fetishism: the forgotten cornerstone of sexuality

## Introduction

In this part, we discuss Freud's theory on fetishism, and examine the sources he bases himself on to elaborate his theory. The most important of these are three texts of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Charcot and Magnan's 'Genital Inversions, and Other Sexual Perversions' (1882), Alfred Binet's 'Fetishism in Love' (1887) and Krafft-Ebing's 'Psychopathia Sexualis' (1886). We follow the main line of their respective theorizing on fetishism, where the attempt of categorization of the perversions, a fascination with raw case-material and a focus on degeneracy and heredity as causes are pivotal. But we also highlight passages in their texts that, while their authors turn a blind eye to them, contain observations and ideas that later theories on fetishism focus on.

Freud's own theory of fetishism develops in three phases, in which he gradually shifts focus from the study of the *object* of fetishism to the study of the subject in fetishism. Firstly, he briefly deals with fetishism in the context of the study of perversions in his groundbreaking work on sexuality from 1905: "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d). While very indebted to Charcot, Binet and Krafft-Ebing, he also, almost between the lines, lays the first stone of his later theories: the idea that a fetish stands in for the woman's missing phallus.

In the period between 1905 and 1910, Freud develops this idea further and puts fetishism in relation with infantile masturbation and the castration complex.

In the third period, from 1911 onwards, we first follow the dialectical development of the three aforementioned ideas – infantile masturbation, the castration complex and the missing phallus – and subsequently focus on two of Freud's most important late texts. In 'Fetishism' (1927e) and "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1940e [1938]), Freud describes the formation of a screen memory as the origin of fetishism, which leads



to the introduction of the concept of 'disavowal' and the ensuing 'splitting' of the subject's ego. Freud sees 'disavowal' as a specific defense mechanism, which is characteristic for and unifies his views on perversion in general. Decades later, Lacan will firmly link the particular defense mechanisms with particular subject structures: repression with neurosis, denial with perversion and foreclosure with psychosis. Last but not least, we examine Freud's intuition of the linguistic mechanisms at play in fetishism. While most commentators miss this aspect, this sign-character will be of prime importance to Lacan's theory of fetishism.

### Freud's sources

At the end of the nineteenth century, the pioneers of sexology take to perversion in general and specifically to fetishism as one of their main objects of study, the imprint of which still is detectable in today's psychiatric discourse. From all the sexual deviations, as Foucault puts it in his "History of Sexuality" (1978), fetishism is studied by the sexologists as "the model perversion" which, "as early as 1877, served as the guiding thread for analyzing all the other deviations" (p. 154). Three of these sexologists are of prime importance to our study of fetishism, because of the influence they have on Freud's theories: Charcot, Binet and Krafft-Ebing. They are all fascinated by perversion in general and fetishism in particular: they study these phenomena as the 'limit cases' that must throw light on 'normal' human sexuality.

Two facts explain this fascination. Firstly, in contrast to 'normal' sexuality, fetishism – as in the stereotypical shoe fetishism – does not necessarily involve an animate sexual object. Secondly, there is no such thing as human sexuality without a certain fixation on inanimate objects – or at least with non-genital body parts. But despite this fascination, the research of the pioneer sexologists doesn't result in much more than an abundant collection of case descriptions and the idea that fetishism, like other perversions, is the result of degeneracy. The seeds for a more complete theory on fetishism, however, are already present in some of their works: several of their observations, interpretations and

ideas provide the building blocks for Freud's subsequent work, which is the reason why we review their major contributions.

## Charcot and Magnan

Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) is one of France's most influential physicians of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His work on hysteria and hypnotism at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris attracts the attention of Freud, who works with Charcot in 1885 and 1886. This collaboration will contribute greatly to Freud's later work and the birth of psycho-analysis (Mijolla, 2005, p. 275).

In 1882 Charcot publishes, together with his colleague Valentin Magnan, the influential paper 'Genital Inversions, and Other Sexual Perversions' (Charcot & Magnan, 1882). The two physicians are the first to describe cases of what will later be labeled fetishism from a medical perspective. In the paper some cases of homosexuality – the 'inversion of the genital sense' – are discussed, followed by three cases of fetishism. While these cases are impressive, they are put in the same bag as homosexuality: "they constitute simply some of the semeiologic varieties under which degenerates can present themselves" (Charcot & Magnan, 1882, p. 305).<sup>6</sup> The authors speak, for all sexual perversions, of an 'obsession' with an object. Whatever object the obsession focuses on, is a matter of indifference to Charcot and Magnan: "Whether instead of hobnails, nightcaps, or of the white apron, we consider an obsession that has a man as its object, the phenomena take place in the same manner" (pp. 321)<sup>7</sup>.

The authors draw a parallel with what they call other 'impulsive states' – they refer to dipsomania as an example – where they find "the same struggles, the same resistances, the same anxieties, and habitually, at all costs, 'the final satisfaction of the sick need' " (p. 322).<sup>8</sup> These 'impulsive states' are, even when they look benign, always manifestations

of an underlying mental problem: “One needs a specific field (hereditary predisposition, degeneracy) for such a flourishing to produce itself; also, whenever one takes a closer look at the pathologic life of these individuals, one will always [...] discover the most profound nevropathic or psychopathic state” (p. 322).<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that the authors do not single out fetishism as a perversion in its own right, the three cases of fetishism Charcot and Magnan describe – in which the fetishes are, as mentioned above, nails for woman’s shoes, nightcaps and white aprons – are all rich in detail and worth of further study. Because of their historic value and because of certain details of the observations that will later on reveal their theoretical value, we will quote from all three of them.

#### *The hobnail fetishist*

Around the age of six or seven, M. X... was already pushed by an irresistible instinct to look at woman’s feet to see if there were nails at their soles; whenever there were, the sight of these nails produced in his entire being an undefinable happiness. Two young girls, family members, stayed in his house; he went to the place where their shoes were kept; he took them with a feverish and trembling hand; he touched the nails, he counted them, he couldn’t keep his eyes off them, and in the evening, in his bed, he focused his thoughts alternatively on one or the other of these young girls, and he let them play a fantastical role that he imagined; he saw her mother lead her to the shoemaker, he heard her command to garnish the shoes of her daughter with nails, he saw the shoemaker put the nails on and return the shoes to the young girl; then, he tried to imagine the sensations that she felt walking with her hobnailed shoes; finally, he inflicted the cruelest tortures to the girl, he put hobnails under her feet, like one does with horses, or he cut her feet off, and at the same time he masturbated (p. 308).<sup>10</sup>

From the rest of the text, and from the almost voyeuristic fascination of the authors, it is clear that what the authors want to describe most, is the ‘abnormality’ of the situation. But the fact that the patient gets sexually aroused by inanimate objects, and even ejaculates at the mere sight or touch of it, is only interpreted as proof of their subject’s degeneracy. However, their observation and interpretation contain some interesting elements around which the later theories of fetishism will revolve:

The fetishistic tendency is already present during childhood, whereby the age of six or seven is frequently mentioned.

The fetishist constructs a fixed scenario. This is especially clear in the following quote: “one of these fantastic stories [...] came back to his mind, sentence by sentence” (p. 309).<sup>11</sup> The fact that the scenario ‘comes to the mind’ of the patient ‘sentence by sentence’ is important: it stresses the fixity of the fetishistic scenario, but also points to its linguistic character, to the fact that it consists of language: “the intensity of his spasm [...] is not always the same, it varies with the circumstances: it is less intense, for example, when M. X..., speaking with a shoemaker, he hears him talk, in a general manner, about nails one uses to put on women’s shoes; it is more intense if he speaks about women he knows, or, if instead of saying *to put nails on boots of women*, the shoemaker says: *to shoe women’s boots*, and better still *to shoe women*” (p. 311).<sup>12</sup>

The scenario results in and revolves around a significant image: the cutting off of the feet. While Charcot and Magnan simply present this observation without any further interpretation, it is interesting to point out that it is specifically this kind of image, representing the removal of a body part, that Freud later interprets as related to castration.

The fetishists seem to be overcome by their sexual enjoyment in an unmediated, direct way. The enjoyment seems to be too big, out of control: “The impression is sometimes such that he is on the verge of fainting, or has nervous and irrepressible fits of laughter which last several minutes” (p. 312).<sup>13</sup> They also mention exaltation, spasms, feeling submerged by a force superior to one’s will, burning head, stiffened extremities, clenched teeth, closed fists, and an impossibility to resist (pp. 307-314).

The existence of a special kind of canalization of sexual enjoyment. The subject in fetishism masturbates while telling himself his fetishistic scenario, but tries to delay ejaculation in order to make the scenario last. This shows how the fetishistic scenario protects – and at the same time fails to protect totally – the subject against a sexual enjoyment that is out of control. It is as if it were an attempt to ‘tame’ or ‘regulate’: “he

would have wanted that the ejaculation did not take place, because it kept him from continuing and finishing his story, and he preferred by far the pleasure he felt from the story to the pleasure the ejaculation procured him" (p. 309).<sup>14</sup>

### *The nightcap fetishist*

In the case of the nightcap-fetishist one also finds the infantile character: the fetish appears first when the subject is five years old. It occurs when the subject sees – probably for the first time – a naked woman. Here, the fetish (a wrinkled female head with a nightcap) seems to function at the same time as a stand-in for the female sexual organ (the wrinkled head) and as something that covers it: the nightcap. This ambiguity of the presence/absence of the sexual organs will later on be one of the keys around which the theories of fetishism will revolve. The elements and their description, however, are already present in Charcot and Magnan's text:

At the age of five years, having slept for five months in the same bed as a parent of about thirty years old, he felt for the first time a singular phenomenon; it was a genital excitation and the erection, from the moment he saw his bed companion put on a nightcap onwards. Around the same period, he had the occasion to see a female servant undress, and from the moment she put on her nightcap, he felt very excited and the erection produced itself immediately. Later onwards, only the idea of the head of an old woman, ugly and wrinkled, but with a nightcap on, provoked the genital orgasm (p. 315).<sup>15</sup>

In the nightcap fetishist, we can again recognize the presence of images that Freud will later interpret as related to castration: "he has hallucinations at night, these already made their appearance at the age of ten [...]: he mostly sees a black beast that wants to take him by the throat" (p. 316).<sup>16</sup>

### *The white apron fetishist*

From the third case, the fetishist of white aprons, we isolate only one trait, a trait Lacan later elaborate as particularly characteristic for perversion: the special relationship of the

fetishist to the law: in order to get hold of his fetish, which is a common object he could have come by in many other ways, the fetishist sometimes transgresses the law to get hold of his object of predilection: “at fifteen impulsive obsession pushing him to steal white aprons to masturbate with; dreams of white aprons; sometimes sleeps with the white apron; three condemnations for theft of white aprons” (Charcot and Magnan, 1882, p. 317).

From Charcot and Magnan’s descriptions of cases of fetishism, apart from their historical importance and from the idea that sexual objects can be inanimate, we retain three key traits. They are not the traits that Charcot and Magnan stress themselves, but they are the traits that show the compatibility between the two cited authors and Freud’s and Lacan’s later theories:

Firstly, a fetishistic tendency can be present at an early age. Secondly, some fetishists construct fixed, language-based scenarios that seem to regulate sexual enjoyment and in which the fetish stands in for the female sexual organ, ambiguously hiding and revealing it at the same time. Finally, some fetishists have a specific relationship to the law.

## Binet

Alfred Binet (1857-1911) is a French psychologist, mostly known as the father of the famous Binet-Simon intelligence test. As a researcher at the Parisian neurological clinic la Salpêtrière, he studies the new field of hypnosis and suggestion under Jean-Martin Charcot. For psycho-analysis, Binet’s importance lies in his 1887 paper “Fetishism in Love” (1887), the only paper he wrote on the subject.

It is Binet who coins the use of the term fetishism to describe a certain type of sexuality. He points out the origin of the word fetish, a derivative from the Portuguese *fetisso*, which

means enchanted thing, fairy thing; fetisso itself comes from fate, destiny. The field from which Binet borrows the term is anthropology: "The adoration of these ill people for inanimate objects like nightcaps or hobnails resembles on all points the adoration of the wild man or the negro for fish bones or for shiny stones, with the difference that, in the cult of our ill people, the religious adoration is replaced by a sexual appetite" (p. 144).<sup>17</sup>

The case-material Binet refers to comes mainly, as the quote above shows, from Charcot and Magnan's study. Unlike them, Binet clearly separates fetishism from other perversions. The common denominator for fetishism is that of sexual arousal by 'unnatural' objects. Binet speaks of "the penchant that subjects sense for objects that are incapable to satisfy normally their genital needs. [These] subjects have in common a quite curious characteristic: a sexual appetite that presents a *vicious insertion* that applies itself to objects to which normally it does not apply" (p. 144).<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Charcot and Magnan's psychiatric angle, Binet provides a more psychological account of the phenomenon. This psychological point of view makes him focus less on hereditary factors or degeneration. Instead, he deals with "the direct study of the symptom, of the analysis of the formation of its mechanism, in the light that these morbid cases throw on the psychology of love" (p. 260).<sup>19</sup> For the author, his study of fetishism revolves around a single question: "Why does one love one person instead of another?" (p. 260).<sup>20</sup>

As for the various fetishistic behaviors, Binet describes them as a continuous spectrum: "fetishism differs only by degree from normal love: one can say that it is present as a germ in normal love; it suffices that the germ grows to make the perversion appear" (p. 272).<sup>21</sup>

Binet even calls normal love the result of a complicated fetishism: "in normal love the fetishism is polytheistic: it results, not from a unique excitation, but from a myriad of

excitations: it is a symphony. Where does the pathology start? It starts at the moment the love of an ordinary detail becomes prominent, to the point where it effaces all the others” (p. 274).<sup>22</sup>

### *Types of fetishism*

The fetishistic spectrum stretches from ‘normal fetishism’ or ‘fetishism in love’ to ‘pathological fetishism’, which Binet also terms respectively ‘small fetishism’ and ‘grand fetishism’. Small fetishism is a constitutive part of normal sexuality: “there is a constant dose of fetishism in the most regular love” (p. 144).<sup>23</sup> It is the factor that explains why a subject is sexually attracted to a certain class of objects instead of being attracted to all objects indiscriminately, and as such one of the reasons why Binet is interested in fetishism: because it throws light on ‘normal’ sexuality. The type example of small fetishism makes this clear: ‘A rich, distinguished, intelligent man marries a woman without youth nor beauty nor anything that attracts men commonly; there is maybe in these unions a sympathy of smell or something analogous: it is *small fetishism*” (p. 145).<sup>24</sup>

Grand fetishism, on the contrary, is a perversion of “degenerates who sense an intense genital excitation during the contemplation of certain inanimate objects that leave the normal individual completely indifferent” (p. 144).<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding Binet’s curiosity for two of Charcot and Magnan’s examples of grand fetishism cited above – in which the fetishes are nightcaps and hobnails –, he seems to be fascinated even more by the third example, which seems to typify grand fetishism for him. Where the hobnail-fetishist is caught by the police masturbating in front of a cobbler’s, and the lover of nightcaps needs to think about his object in order to be able to have intercourse with his wife, the object of a third fetishist is, according to Binet, even more bizarre: “the obsession, formerly fixed to white aprons, extended itself progressively



to all white objects; washed linen drying on a line, and even a chalk-whitened wall suffice to provoke a sexual reaction” (p. 163).<sup>26</sup>

The differentiating factor between grand and small fetishism lies, for Binet, in the relation to the object: in small fetishism, the object is a beloved person, in grand fetishism it is either a singular aspect of a person – a big nose for instance –, or an object that seemingly bears no relation to a person – like the extreme example of the lover of white objects. The fascinating factor, on the other hand, apart from the remoteness between the fetish and the normal sexual object, seems to be the fact that some fetishists break the law in order to obtain the object of choice – as in Binet’s examples of a fetishist cutting off female hair in public and one who steals white aprons (p. 144).

Another distinction Binet introduces to subdivide fetishists, is also the one he uses to divide his paper in chapters: it is a rather clumsy subdivision by types of fetish. He calls ‘the cult for corporal objects’ (or ‘plastic love’) the cases where “the cult addresses itself to a fraction of the person, or to an emanation of the person” (p. 160).<sup>27</sup> The second category is ‘the cult of material objects’: “The material objects of this cult of love are loved mostly because they call a person to mind: they have principally an assumed value. In other cases, we see the inert thing acquire some kind of independence; it is loved not any more for the person it calls to mind, but for itself” (p. 161).<sup>28</sup> As a third category, Binet proposes the cult for a psychic quality (or ‘spiritual love’). As he only deals with cases of masochism under this heading – as a cult for the dominant character of woman – this category is of less importance to the study of fetishism.

### *Association of ideas*

After Binet’s description of cases and his distinctions of fetishism in categories, he comes to a new definition of pathological fetishism: “[it] consists of the exaggerated sexual importance that one attaches to a secondary and insignificant detail” (p. 262).<sup>29</sup> It is

“some kind of hypertrophy of an element that results in an atrophy of all the other elements” (p. 263).

As for the cause of this hypertrophy, whether for the ‘degenerate’ grand fetishism or the ‘normal’ small fetishism, Binet points to an accidental ‘association of ideas’ between sexual arousal and an insignificant detail from infancy: “We find a coincidence between the genital excitation and an exterior fact; the coincidence changes in an association of ideas [...] at an age where all associations are strong [...] – there we have the source of the obsession” (p. 166).

This association of ideas only has a pathogenic effect when the ground is prepared by heredity: “As for the causes of the fetishism described above, they are difficult to disentangle. The heredity comes first, as a preparation” (p. 159).<sup>30</sup> But heredity is not enough: “Heredity, in our opinion, is not capable to give to this illness its characteristic form; when a subject adores hobnails, and another one woman’s eyes, it is not heredity that is in charge of explaining why their obsession bears on one object instead of on another” (p. 164).<sup>31</sup>

In an aside to the main line of his argument, Binet deals with *smells* as fetishes. He seems fascinated with the predominance of the olfactory over the other senses, and even sees it, next to hereditary factors and the association of ideas, as a possible *cause* of fetishism (p. 159).

Some characteristics Binet ascribes to this ‘association of ideas’ and its consequences are most interesting:

The association of ideas is a psychical cause (p. 152). It is like a canal that conducts the flow of sexual feelings (p. 151). It arises by accident: “In the preceding observations, we

saw that an accident, as such totally insignificant, has been engraved in profound and indelible traits in the memory of these sick people” (p. 167).<sup>32</sup> Association proceeds by abstraction and generalization: “One notices, in the evolution of the sexual perversion, the abstraction leads to the *generalization*. The sick person doesn’t attach himself uniquely to a particular person: his love is not individualist” (p. 264).<sup>33</sup> As such, it contains a detachment of the object from its surroundings, making an independent whole from a part (p. 263). Finally, it works by resemblance or contiguity (p. 152).

The importance of these characteristics lies in the fact that it is a *mental process* (the association of ideas) that *causes* the way sexual enjoyment is organized (i.e. as fetishism) for the patient.

This mental process is responsible for the choice of the sexual object by abstraction and generalization of a *trait*, which is isolated and made into an independent whole. It is explained by Binet as a fixation of details by a *sign*: “The necessity to fixate these little evasive nuances by a word that serves as a sign for them, makes us adopt the term of *abstraction*” (p. 263).<sup>34</sup> As such it is not only responsible for the *choice* of the object, but as well for its *constitution*.

A striking example of this *sign*-character of the fetish is to be found in Binet’s description of the hobnail fetishist: “he finds a burning pleasure in repeating words destined to enliven the image of these objects; he is very pleased with the expression ‘to *shoe* a woman’” (p. 167).<sup>35</sup> What is striking here, is the fact that it is the mere repetition of *words* that arouses a burning pleasure: the fetish seems here to be condensed into one simple, but charged expression. It are precisely these kind of ideas that allow Lacan later on, using the conceptual framework of structuralism, to theorize the linguistic character of the fetish. As for the character of the fetishistic sexual enjoyment, it is interesting to note how it can be *total*, how it can be *sufficient*, and how it can be more *intense* than ‘normal’ sexual enjoyment: “This unnatural love has a tendency to produce continence; to put it better, it produces impotency with a psychic cause” (p. 267),<sup>36</sup> and: “an erection can

result from the sole contemplation of the object. A genital excitation of such intensity surpasses a little bit the normal level" (p. 150).<sup>37</sup>

At the end of his paper, Binet concludes that fetishism is a different arrangement of the same elements we find in normal sexuality: there is the idea of a broken harmony, where one part of the sexual drive detaches itself from the whole and takes center stage:

Normal love is harmonious; the lover loves all elements of the woman to the same degree, all parts of her body and every manifestation of her soul. In the sexual perversion, we don't see any new element appear; but the harmony is broken; love, instead of being aroused by the entire person, is only aroused by a fraction. Here, the part substitutes itself for the whole, the accessory becomes the principal [...] The love of the perverted is a piece of theater where a simple extra advances towards the stage and takes the place of the first role (p. 274).<sup>38</sup>

Historically speaking, Binet's paper signifies an important progress in the understanding of fetishism. A thorough reading of the paper confirms the three ideas retained from Charcot (see above), but we retain five new key ideas as well, which, as with Charcot, appear more in the unelaborated observations of his paper than in the main line of his argument:

Normal love has fetishistic aspects, but in normal love these aspects are connected in a 'harmonious' fashion. A coincidence between genital excitation and an exterior fact produces an association of ideas, which crystallizes into a fetish. This association of ideas is not only responsible for the choice of the fetishistic object, but as well for its constitution. The fetish regulates sexual enjoyment: it can be sufficient for total sexual enjoyment, which can surpass the intensity of normal sexual enjoyment. Moreover, it operates as a *sign* that takes the place of the sexual object.

## Krafft-Ebing

Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) is an Austro-German sexologist and psychiatrist. He is the first psychiatrist to attempt a systematic, scientific study of the whole field of atypical sexuality. His main work, "Psychopathia Sexualis, with especial reference to the antipathic sexual instinct, a medico-forensic study" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886) is a famous and extensive series of case studies covering the varieties of human sexual behavior. This book stays the reference work on psycho-sexual diversity for decades. We trace the main line of the chapter on fetishism, and highlight some ideas that seem precursory to later theories on fetishism.

### *Refining Binet*

In "Psychopathia Sexualis", Krafft-Ebing divides what he calls 'cerebral neuroses' into four categories, one of which is paraesthesia: sexual desire for the 'wrong' goal or object. Under paraesthesia he classifies, among others, homosexuality, sexual fetishism, sadism, masochism and pedophilia. His definition of fetishism is simple and straightforward: "The association of lust with the idea of certain portions of the female person, or with certain articles of female attire" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886, p. 218). Remark the difference with Binet's definition: the stress lies here more on the connection of the fetish with the female body.

Krafft-Ebing's case material is extensive: he describes 37 cases of fetishism, divided in four categories. Once more, cases of fetishism are subdivided according to the objects that function as fetish: firstly 'the fetish is a part of the female body', secondly 'the fetish is an article of female attire', thirdly 'the fetish is some special material', and fourthly, oddly enough, 'beast fetishism'. This latter category, in which Krafft-Ebing deals with zoophilia, is beyond the scope of this study, but it is interesting to note that Charcot

(homosexuality), Binet (masochism) and Krafft-Ebing (zoophilia) all include what we now see as different perversions, in the same category as fetishism.

Just like Binet, Krafft-Ebing also breaks fetishism down in a 'normal' and 'pathological' variety: he calls them respectively 'physiological' and 'pathological' fetishism. Here as well, the transition between both forms is gradual.

Krafft-Ebing considers physiological fetishism as an integral, non-pathological component of love: "the especial power of attraction possessed by certain forms and peculiarities for many men – in fact, the majority – may be regarded as the real principle of individualism in love" (p. 218).

What makes pathological fetishism pathological is: "the fact that the whole sexual interest is concentrated on the impression made by a part of the person of the opposite sex, so that all other impressions fade and become more or less indifferent (Krafft-Ebing, 1886: p. 219).

Krafft-Ebing seems to find it difficult to designate a criterion to distinguish the physiological from the pathological. While he often points out the necessity for the presence of the fetish for the possibility of performance of coitus, he also discusses cases in which coitus without presence of the fetish is merely difficult: the possibility of the performance of coitus cannot be a pathological criterion.

Where the fetish is a part of the female body, Krafft-Ebing sees 'purely subjective psychological states' as the pathological criterion: "they do not regard coitus as the real means of sexual gratification, but rather some form of manipulation of that portion of the body that is effectual as a fetish" (p. 220). What is interesting in this point of view, is the fact that the pathological criterion doesn't lie in *behavior* that deviates from the norm, but in a *subjective psychological state*.

Fetishism of inanimate objects or articles of dress, on the other hand, is pathological as such. The author admits that in normal love, some inanimate objects can become the object of worship, but only “because they represent a mnemonic symbol of the beloved person absent or dead whose whole personality is reproduced by them” (p. 221). The pathological criterion lies in the fact that for the fetishist:

The fetish constitutes the entire content of his idea. When he becomes aware of its presence, sexual excitement occurs, and the fetish makes itself felt [...] At the sight [of the fetish], worn by a lady or even alone, they are thrown into sexual excitement, even to the extent of ejaculation (p. 222).

Just like for Binet, the fetish constitutes the whole of the sexual object; just like for Binet, fetishism regulates sexual enjoyment entirely.

For Krafft-Ebing, unsurprisingly, pathological fetishism, like most of the other perversions, occurs only on the basis of a psychopathic constitution that is for the most part hereditary, or on the basis of existent mental disease. However, unlike the other perversions, and notwithstanding a constitutional basis, for pathological fetishism every case requires a specific *event* which affords the ground for the perversion. Krafft-Ebing explicitly borrows this idea from Binet: “we may accept Binet’s conclusion that in the life of every fetishist there may be assumed to have been some event which determined the association of lustful feeling with the single impression” (p. 222). As a stand-in for a *single* impression, the fetish “assumes the form of a distinctive mark” (p. 19).

Krafft-Ebing also mentions the idea of an accidental association:

This event must be sought for in the time of early youth, and, as a rule, occurs in connection with the first awakening of the *vita sexualis*. This first awakening is associated with some partial sexual impression (since it is always a thing standing in some relation to woman), and stamps it for life as the principal object of sexual interest. The circumstances under which the association arises are usually forgotten; the result of the association alone is retained (p. 220).

While rephrasing Binet, Krafft-Ebing goes a little bit further, is a little bit more precise. The small differences in his formulations are of interest in the light of the later theories of fetishism: the origin of fetishism is connected with the *first* awakening of sexual desire, the association is with a *partial* sexual impression, and this impression is *always* a thing that stands in some relation to woman. Also interesting is the mention of the *forgetting* of the circumstances under which the association arises.

### *New ideas*

Krafft-Ebing's refined clinical line of reasoning also opens the way for some new ideas that one does not find in Binet, but will be of importance for the subsequent development of psychoanalytic theory on fetishism. These ideas do not belong to the main line of his argument, but can be sifted out from details of cases, in footnotes and in casual observations. We retain three of these.

The first idea is the anticipatory function of the fetish. As Krafft-Ebing describes in a footnote to his treatment of female attire as fetishes, "the partly veiled form is often more charming than when it is perfectly nude [...] This depends upon the effect of contrast and expectation" (p. 248). So, when female attire functions as a fetish, it has to do something with the expectation of seeing the female genitals. Also, the *perception of the fetish*, stands in contrast and covers *the actual sight of the female genitals*. Later, Lacan uses the anticipatory function to interpret the fetish as a *veil* which *protects* the subject against an *expected, but uncanny perception* of the female genitals.

The second idea of a double, seemingly contradictory behavior towards the fetish is similarly touched upon only sideways: "A combination of fetishism with an impulse to destroy the fetish (in a certain sense, sadism with objects) seems to occur quite frequently" (p. 253). This ambivalent attitude towards the fetishistic object is even more



clear in the following quotation: “the impulse to injure the fetish [...] represents an element of sadism toward the woman wearing the fetish” (p. 274).

A third and last idea we want to highlight is one we already highlighted in the paragraph on Binet: the linguistic aspect of the fetish. Krafft-Ebing hints at it in two places. The first one, where the author relays the words of a fur-fetishist, sounds quite innocent: “Merely pictures of costumes of furs and velvet are objects of erotic interest to me; indeed, the very word “fur” has a magic charm, and immediately calls up erotic ideas” (p. 270). The second significant passage is taken from a case where the fetish is the foot of a halting female:

he anchored his hope on the thought that he might succeed in winning and marrying a chaste lame girl, that, on account of his love for her, she would take pity on him and free him of his crime by “transferring his love from the sole of her foot to the foot of her soul.” He sought deliverance in this thought (p. 236).

This passage indicates more than just the fact that there is a relation between the fetish as an object and the words representing it. It shows that in connection to fetishism, something linguistic is operative on the level of the unconscious. Also noteworthy is the transference of value from the foot to elsewhere.

### *Conclusion to Krafft-Ebing*

While Krafft-Ebing compiles a wealth of case-material, he doesn't really take the theory on fetishism further than Binet's. However, because of their future importance, we retain the following key traits that appear in the filigree of his treatise:

It is not in behavior that deviates from the norm, but in a *subjective psychical state* that the criterion for fetishism lies. The origin of fetishism is connected with the *first* awakening of sexual desire, associated with a *partial* sexual impression of a something that stands in some relation to woman. The circumstances under which the association takes place are *forgotten*. It is in the form of a *distinctive mark* that the fetish arises. The fetish functions

as a *veil* that *protects* the subject against an *expected perception of the female genitals*. Fetishism is often characterized by an *ambivalent attitude* towards the fetishistic object. In fetishism, something linguistic is operative of which the subject is not conscious. The fetish functions as a container to which value from elsewhere is transferred.

## Conclusion on Freud's predecessors

The close reading of the three key texts of Freud's predecessors and the special attention we gave to some traits that link their work with Freud's and Lacan's later theories, allow us not only to show the richness of their observations and thinking, but also to point out some aspects in their argument that are vague or absent, and that Freud and Lacan later will refine or fill in.

The observations and the thinking of the sexologists result into some key ideas on fetishism. They can be summarized as follows:

Normal love has fetishistic aspects, but these aspects are harmoniously ordered and lead to 'normal' sexual intercourse. Therefore, the behavior of the fetishist can't be seen as the pathological criterion for fetishism. This criterion lies in a subjective psychical state that finds its roots in an association of the awakening of genital excitation with a contingent exterior fact. This association of ideas crystallizes into a fetish, which operates as a sign in a language-based scenario that is instrumental for the regulation of sexual enjoyment in an intense, non-standard way. In fetishists, one can find an ambivalent attitude towards the fetishistic object, and a specific relationship to the law.

Under the next heading, we will discuss how Freud's theories on fetishism build largely on the findings of the sexologists, but also expand beyond them. The three most important points Freud adds to their framework are the following:

Firstly, the fact that the perception that lies at the root of fetishism is a traumatic one and concerns the difference between the sexes, condensed in the fact that women do not have a penis. Secondly, the fact that disavowal of this perception and an ensuing splitting of the ego is central to a better understanding of fetishism and of perversion in general. Finally, the idea that the sexuality of the 'normal' subject is structured and canalized around the prohibition of incest, while the fetishist lacks this structure.

### Freud's missing female phallus

As said, Freud relies heavily on the work of the first sexologists; but his theory stretches far beyond. Like Binet, he sees the human sexual instinct as always already deflected by what he calls a partial overvaluation of the sexual object and *thus* by fetishism: "[In fetishism....] the point of contact with the normal is provided by the psychologically essential overvaluation of the sexual object, which inevitably extends to everything that is associated with it. A certain degree of fetishism is thus habitually present in normal love" (Freud, 1905d, p. 154).<sup>39</sup> For Freud, as for his precursors, fetishism stays the cornerstone of sexuality. And, as 'abnormal' sexuality, it is characterized as the perversion of perversions – a notion Lacan will later use.<sup>40</sup>

But the central idea he introduces about the origin of fetishism, is new. Freud claims that the disavowal of an infantile traumatic perception of the fact that women have no phallus, leads to a displacement of libidinal value from the missed phallus to the fetish (1927e, p. 152). That, what in the texts of the sexologists remained a blind spot, becomes explicit in Freud. According to him, the fundamentally fetishistic character of sexuality can be structured – and this is the normal case – by what Freud calls the Oedipus complex.

In his theory about fetishism, Freud argues that without the structuring influence of the Oedipus complex, a person's subsequent sexuality will remain fetishistic, and that at the basis of fetishism a disavowal can be found that gives rise to a splitting of the ego. As he elaborates this idea, Freud's theoretical work passes through three phases, which we

discuss in the following paragraphs. In a first phase, fetishism is interpreted based on a model of drive-defense and repression. In the second phase, Freud's theory on fetishism gradually develops in the background of the introduction of his second topical model of the psychic apparatus. In the third phase, Freud comes to locate the mechanism of disavowal (*Verleugnung*) at the center of his theory on fetishism. All the while, fetishism is seen as paradigmatic for the interpretation of all perversions.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to stress that the term Oedipus complex in Freud covers a broad network of ideas and concepts, which develop considerably over the course of his oeuvre. It is remarkable that in his analysis of fetishism, he only uses it in its 'simplest' sense, the one he develops first in his work.

The most known and most obvious part of this network of ideas and concepts turns around the classical love of the parent of the opposite sex and hate for the parent of the same sex. The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis puts it well: "[The Oedipus complex] designates a network embracing the wishes and hostile impulses of which the mother and the father are the objects, along with the defenses that are set up to counter these feelings" (de Mijolla, 2005, p. 1183).

The term first appears in Freud's work in "A special type of object-choice made by man" (1910h, p. 171), but the reference to the myth of Oedipus is to be found already in a letter to Fliess from October 15, 1897: "I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy of the father, and we now regard it as a universal event early childhood... If that is so, we can understand the riveting power of *Oedipus Rex*" (Masson, 2006, p. 344).

But another crucial part of this network turns around the concept of the law and the prohibition of incest as foundations for culture and subjectivity. It is more complex, more abstract and surfaces later in Freud's work. It is the crystallization of what he calls in his

“Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) the “mental dams against sexual excesses – shame, disgust and morality” (p. 191) – without using the term Oedipus complex. This crystallization happens only clearly in “Totem and Taboo” (1912-1913). Laplanche and Pontalis describe it well:

This idea is brought out particularly in the hypothesis proposed in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) of the killing of the primal father – an act seen as the first moment in the genesis of mankind. Questionable as it is from an historical point of view, this hypothesis should be understood primarily as the mythical transposition of the inevitability, for every human, of being an ‘Oedipus in germ’. The Oedipus complex is not reducible to an actual situation – to the actual influence exerted by the parental couple over the child. Its efficacy derives from the fact that it brings into play a proscriptive agency (the prohibition against incest – which bars the way to naturally sought satisfaction and forms an indissoluble link between *wish* and *law* (1988, p. 286).<sup>42</sup>

This second, more complex elaboration of the Oedipus complex is unfortunately not used by Freud to articulate the special relation between the subject in perversion and the law. It is one of the lacunae Lacan will try to fill.

### First period: unsuitable substitutes for the sexual objects

In order to understand the context in which Freud deals with fetishism, it is important to keep in mind how close he stays to the above mentioned sexologists. He studied under Charcot in 1885-86 (Jones, 1961), read and quoted Binet,<sup>43</sup> but probably was not acquainted with him – at least two of his most important biographers do not mention an encounter.<sup>44</sup> As for Krafft-Ebing, he was in close contact with Freud at the University of Vienna. Although he was highly critical of Freud’s work, Krafft-Ebing actively supported Freud’s application for a professorship (Oosterhuis, 2000). It is with their work as main source material that Freud develops his early ideas on sexual aberrations – i.e. perversions – in general. Accordingly, before focusing on fetishism, we deal first briefly with Freud’s early views of perversion in general.

### *Infantile sexuality as polymorphous perverse*

The key text is here “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d, with important re- editions in 1910, 1915, 1920, 1922 and 1924), the first of which is devoted to the study of “The sexual aberrations”. The other two essays, respectively “Infantile sexuality” and “Transformations of puberty” are of less importance to our study.

The essay on sexual aberrations is structured around an attempt to develop a detailed classification for the different deviations, a method Krafft-Ebing used as well in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1887). The two main categories of aberrations Freud discerns, are deviations in respect to sexual objects and deviations in respect to sexual aims. The sexual *object* is defined as “the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds”, the sexual *aim* as “the act towards which the instinct tends” (Freud, 1905d, p. 135). The norm from which Freud studies the deviations is double: sexuality with a normal object and a normal aim, where the normal sexual object is an adult of the opposite sex and the normal aim is genital intercourse.

What makes Freud’s theory dig deeper into perversion than the pioneer sexologists, is the lens through which he looks at sexual aberrations. His investigations into perversion start from the material with which his neurotic patients confront him. The unconscious sexual fantasies his analytic work brings to the surface, incites him to study infantile sexuality. Where his precursors see normal sexuality as containing fetishistic traits, he finds the roots of normal sexuality in infantile sexuality, which he claims is essentially perverse. Freud first mentions – albeit cursorily – this view of perversion as inherent to infantile sexuality in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess from 24 January 1897 (Masson, 2006, p. 289), and develops it further in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d).

The idea of infantile sexuality – and thus the roots of sexuality in general – being perverse might seem shocking. But when one applies Freud’s definition of perversion, it

becomes clear that infantile sexuality is seen as perverse simply because the infantile sexual aim is not genital intercourse: “The sexual aim of the infantile instinct consists in obtaining satisfaction by means of an appropriate stimulation of the erotogenic zone which has been selected in one way or another” (1905d, p. 184). This allows Freud to claim clearly that “the sexual instinct of children proves in fact to be polymorphously perverse” (p. 234).

The connection of sexuality with genital intercourse is made later in development, in the second phase of sexual maturation, during puberty:

The activity of the sexual instinct [...] has hitherto been derived from a number of separate instincts and erotogenic zones, which, independently of one another, have pursued a certain sort of pleasure as their sole sexual aim. Now, however, a new sexual aim appears, and all the component instincts combine to attain it, while the erotogenic zones become subordinated to the primacy of the genital zone (1905d, p. 207).

This idea of subordination is reminiscent of Binet’s view of normal sexuality as a symphony, in which the different instruments are harmonized by one musical director (Binet, 1887, p. 274).

The perverse nature of infantile sexuality, which only later becomes subordinated to genital sexuality, makes infantile perverse sexuality the root and essence out of which all adult sexuality develops. But in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), Freud doesn’t study infantile perverse sexuality for its own sake. His goal is to throw light on the neurotic subjects he encounters in his practice. He defends the thesis that neurotic symptoms give – albeit in an indirect fashion – expression to drives which could be described as perverse if they wouldn’t have been repressed (1905d, p. 231). In other words, repression is the central concept around which Freud structures his theories concerning sexuality, whether normal or deviant.

It is in the context of the study of the unconscious sexual fantasies of neurotics that Freud coins the phrase that will have a strong influence upon the subsequent theory of perversion in psycho-analytic literature: “[neurotic] symptoms are formed in part at the cost of abnormal sexuality; neuroses are, so to say, the negative of the perversions” (p. 165).<sup>45</sup>

This phrase should be handled with care. The metaphor of the ‘negative’ seems to imply a symmetry, a possibility of two way-traffic, of perversion changing into neurosis and of neurosis changing into perversion. But this is not what Freud says. Perversion is – logically and historically – first, and can – under certain circumstances – develop into neurosis. The other way round is a no-go: neurosis cannot develop into perversion. Moreover, neurotic symptoms are formed *only in part* at the cost of perverse, pre-genital sexuality; the *other part* is formed at the cost of ‘normal’, genital sexuality. In neurosis, both parts are repressed. This allows us to state that if neuroses may be a transformation of infantile perversion that might look like a negative of perversions, perversions are certainly not simply the negative of neuroses.

Why is this nuance so important? Because it shows that the fate of all adult sexuality is determined by the vicissitudes of the infantile ‘polymorphously perverse’ sexuality. Note the distinction between infantile and adult sexuality: when infantile sexuality remains unrepressed, the subject will develop into a perverse adult; when normal adult sexuality – appearing at adolescence with the subordination of the component drives to the genital aim – is too heavily repressed, the subject will turn out neurotic (pp. 231-232).

Next to perversion and neurosis, Freud adds a ‘normal case’, which he situates between both extremes:

In one class of cases (the perversions) [the roots of sexual instinct] may grow into the actual vehicles of sexual activity; in others they may be submitted to an insufficient suppression (repression) and thus be able in a roundabout way to attract a considerable proportion of sexual energy to themselves as symptoms;



while in the most favorable cases, which lie between these two extremes, they may by means of effective restriction and other kinds of modification bring about what is known as normal sexual life (p. 172).

The fact that in the case of neurosis Freud speaks in one instance about “too heavily repressed” and another instance about “insufficient suppression” may seem contradictory. But this seeming contradiction can be cleared when we keep in mind that Freud uses here two kinds of repression: an early, infantile repression of the (perverse) component drives, which he calls “the mental dams against sexual excesses – shame, disgust and morality” (p. 191), which are constructed during childhood, and a later, adolescent repression of ‘normal’ sexuality. That is how he can claim that: “Most psychoneurotics only fall ill after the age of puberty as a result of the demands made upon them by normal sexual life. (It is most particularly against the latter that repression is directed)” (p. 170).

To distinguish the component drives from normal sexuality, he uses a hydraulic metaphor. The ‘normal sexuality’ is seen as the main bed of a stream, while the component drives are collateral channels. In perversion, there never was a main bed: all libido continues to flow through the collateral channels, which never have been blocked. But in neurosis, “the libido behaves like a stream whose main bed has become blocked. It proceeds to fill up collateral channels which may hitherto have been empty” (p. 170). In the normal case, the libido is properly channeled through the main bed. But in all of the three cases – neurosis, normality or perversion – the origin of the adult sexual constitution is infantile polymorphously perverse sexuality.

Notwithstanding the fact that the ideas of a failing repression of the component drives and a developmental model of human sexuality throw new light on perversion, Freud still does not depart from the classic hypothesis that constitutional factors and heredity would cause fetishism: “The fact that this [...] turns in the direction of fetishism, as well as the choice of the fetish itself, are constitutionally determined” (pp. 235-236). In this, he doesn’t differ from the sexologists. In his later work, the explanatory function of

constitutional factors and heredity will gradually lose importance. In his main text on fetishism (1927e), for instance, the notion of constitutional factors is not mentioned at all.

### *The fetish as representative of woman's missing penis*

How then does fetishism fit in with Freud's early view on perversion? In his complex classification of sexual aberrations, Freud makes a distinction between 'deviations of the sexual object' and 'deviations of the sexual aim'. The former category covers inversion, pedophilia and zoophilia. All of these are cases where the sexual object is not an adult of the opposite sex. He reserves the term 'perversion' for the latter category: the cases in which the sexual instinct tends to another act than genital intercourse. This category, in turn, falls apart in "sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (p. 150). In this latter part on "intermediate relations", the focus lies mainly on sadism, masochism, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It is in the former part on 'anatomical extensions' that Freud discusses fetishism, under the header "Unsuitable substitutes for the sexual objects – fetishism". The other headers are "sexual use of the mucous membrane of the lips and mouth", "sexual use of the anal orifice" and 'significance of other regions of the body" (p. 150).

Freud defines fetishism as the case where "the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim" (p. 153). But while Freud deals with fetishism under the 'Deviations of the sexual objects', he stipulates that fetishism should have been dealt with earlier in the text, under the heading 'Deviations of sexual aims'. The reason he gives, is the fact that he didn't want to study fetishism until he had enlightened the reader about the 'overvaluation of the sexual object'. This overvaluation – another term Freud borrows from Binet – consists in the psychical valuation with which the sexual object is investigated. This

valuation is not restricted to the genitals, but extends to the whole body of the sexual object and to every sensation derived from it.

It is this overvaluation that explains the fact that sexuality is always already deflected from the 'normal' sexual aim, just like all sexuality is always primarily perverse: "[In fetishism....] the point of contact with the normal is provided by the psychologically essential overvaluation of the sexual object, which inevitably extends to everything that is associated with it. A certain degree of fetishism is thus habitually present in normal love." (p. 154). But where this deflection is partial in normal sexuality, it is complete in fetishism. Till here, what Freud says is almost an exact reformulation of Binet. But the following is new: the fact that the deflection is only partial in normal sexuality, is due to repression – of the 'collateral channels'. In the same way, in 'normal' adults, the perverse instincts are partially repressed, while in pervert adults, they are not.

While Freud sees perversion as insufficiently repressed infantile sexuality, this explanation does not suffice to answer for the specificity of the fetishistic object relation, which consists in the characteristic fixation to 'unsuitable substitutes for the sexual objects'. Freud stresses this specificity: he considers fetishism as "quite specially remarkable" (p. 153) and adds: "No other variation of the sexual instinct that borders on the pathological can lay so much claim to our interest as this one, such is the peculiarity of the phenomena to which it gives rise." (p. 153).

To explain the cause of fetishism, Freud suffices with quoting Binet: "Binet (1888) was the first to maintain (what has since been confirmed by a quantity of evidence) that the choice of a fetish is an after-effect of some sexual impression received as a rule in early childhood" (p. 154). In the main text of the 1905 edition, Freud doesn't elaborate on what kind of sexual impression might have such after-effects. He adds, also without elaboration, Binet's idea of an association of ideas, which he calls an unconscious symbolic connection: "the replacement of the object by a fetish [can be] determined by a

symbolic connection of thought, of which the person concerned is usually not conscious” (p. 155).

Notwithstanding his special interest in the phenomenon and the promising idea of an unconscious symbolic connection, Freud only devotes five paragraphs to fetishism in the main text of the 1905 edition of the “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d). Despite this summary treatment, we find the root of Freud’s future, novel theory on fetishism hidden in an aside to a footnote, and only as applicable to a special case. In the footnote itself, Freud ventures an explanation for foot and shoe fetishism, which clearly is inspired by Binet’s remarks on smells as fetishes: coprophilic pleasure in smelling which has disappeared due to repression. The aside to the note is more interesting and novel: “Another factor that helps towards explaining the fetishistic preference for the foot is to be found among the sexual theories of children: the foot represents a woman’s penis, the absence of which is deeply felt” (p. 155). The discovery that a fetish represents the traumatic perception of the absence of woman’s penis, which in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) only appears in a footnote, is the cornerstone on which Freud builds his subsequent theory of fetishism.

Overall, in this first period of theorizing about fetishism, Freud stays largely tributary to the sexologists. But the novel idea of the fetish representing the woman’s missing penis, combined with the symbolic connection, will be taken up, reworked and combined with new ideas in subsequent works. They will crystallize in Freud’s later theory of fetishism, in which the idea of repression of the perception of the missing penis of women, still absent here, takes center stage.

## Second period: the uncanny absence

Between 1905 and 1910, Freud studies the phenomenon of the little boy's refusal to recognize the fact that women have no penis, but initially without linking it to fetishism. Examples of the study of this phenomenon are to be found in "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908c) and in the famous case study of Little Hans, known under the title of "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909b).

Before analyzing the examples, in order to avoid some common misunderstandings, we will briefly discuss the concept 'phallus' in Freud's work. He does not make a clear distinction between 'penis' and 'phallus'. In his early work, both words clearly only designate the real, biological, male organ. Being male or female is seen as an anatomic fact, and synonymous of the fact that people have or do not have a penis. Later on, the concept 'phallus' seems to take on a wider, more blurred significance, identifying not only the real organ, but also the symbolic function this organ plays. This allows Freud in "The Infantile Genital Organization" (1923e) to claim that for children, "maleness exists, but not femaleness" (p. 312). In other words: the male sexual organ has a symbolic function, the female sex has not.

Laplanche and Pontalis note that "what really characterizes the phallus and re-appears in all its figurative embodiments is its status as a detachable and transformable object" (1988, p. 313). Due to these characteristics, the phallus can be said to have a symbolic function and to be able to circulate, be given and received. Laplanche and Pontalis contend that these features are present in Freud's texts, but they acknowledge that this conception of the phallus is predominately elaborated in the work of Lacan, who will build on the difference between penis and phallus to differentiate between what he calls the imaginary, the symbolic and the real phallus, which we will discuss later.

But let us now turn to the examples. In the first example, from “On the Sexual Theories of Children” (1908c), Freud sketches that the refusal – or inability – to recognize that woman have no penis, finds its source partly in the first infantile sexual theory. It consists in a belief in the absence of sexual differentiation by attributing a penis to everybody: “the boy’s estimate [of the value of the penis] is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself who is without this essential constituent. When a small boy sees his little sister’s genitals, what he says shows that his prejudice is already strong enough to falsify his perception. He does not comment on the absence of a penis, but invariably says, as though by way of consolation and to put things right: “Her – ‘s still quite small. But when she gets bigger it’ll grow all right” (p. 216).

We find the same example of the refusal or incapacity to recognize sexual difference in the case history of Little Hans (1909b), which probably served as one of the three sources Freud used in “On the Sexual Theories of Children” (1908c). In both instances, the phenomenon is described in terms of a simple rejection of perceptual evidence, without connecting it to fetishism.

It is only in “A childhood memory of Leonardo Da Vinci” (1910c) that Freud makes the link. He interprets the artist’s childhood phantasm of a vulture which comes to his cradle and opens his mouth with its tail as an unconscious wish to see woman as provided with a phallus: “We can now provide the following translation of the emphasis given to the vulture’s tail in Leonardo’s phantasm: “That was a time when my fond curiosity was directed to my mother, and when we still believed she had a genital organ like my own” (p. 98). Freud links this idea to the reverence for the foot by foot fetishists, and to the behavior of the hair despoilers described by Binet and Krafft-Ebing:

The fixation on the object that was once strongly desired, the woman’s penis, leaves indelible traces on the mental life of the child, who has pursued that portion of his infantile sexual researches with particular thoroughness. Fetishistic reverence for a woman’s foot and shoe appears to take the foot merely as a substitute symbol for the woman’s penis which was once revered and later missed; without knowing it, ‘coupeurs de nattes’ play the part of people who carry out an act of castration on the female genital organ (1910c, p. 96).

This quotation fills in a gap we find in the early Freud and confirms what we read between the lines in Charcot and Binet. It shows that the fetish stands in for the missing female phallus – by a symbolic connection, that there is a link with castration and it explains the ‘ambivalent attitude’ towards the fetishistic object. It also foreshadows Freud’s later expansion of the idea that the fetish is a substitute for woman’s missing phallus from foot fetishism to fetishism in general.

Two other ideas of prime importance to Freud’s later theory on fetishism are also to be found in the first edition of “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), but are expressed with more clarity and concision in “On the Sexual Theories of Children” (1908c). These ideas are the role of infantile masturbation and the castration complex, seen as the effect of the threat with castration:

The child, having been mainly dominated by excitations in the penis, will usually have obtained pleasure by stimulating it with his hand; he will have been detected in this by his parents or nurse and terrorized by the threat of having his penis cut off. The effect of this ‘threat of castration’ is proportionate to the value set upon that organ and is quite extraordinarily deep and persistent (1908c, p. 217).

In two letters to Karl Abraham of 1909 and 1910 (Falzeder, 2002, p. 83; pp. 105-106), Freud ventures a new, original idea concerning the origin of fetishism: “The fetish [...] results from a particular kind of repression, that we could qualify as partial: a part of the complex is repressed, another part is idealized” (Falzeder, 2002, pp. 105-106). This ‘partial repression’ and ‘partial idealization’ of the castration complex can be seen as the kernel of what Freud later will call a ‘splitting of the ego’ (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 2006, pp. 43-44).

Together with the idea of infantile masturbation, the three ideas surfacing during this period of Freud’s work – the castration complex, the rejection of the uncanny absence of a penis in woman and the splitting of the ego – serve as the cornerstones of Freud’s late theory on fetishism. Here, they are still vague, largely unconnected and not articulated to fetishism, which leaves an important gap in his theory. Moreover, the explanation of

certain phenomenological and structural characteristics of the subject in fetishism lacks completely. This articulation and this explanation are provided in his two seminal papers “Fetishism” (1927e) and “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense” (1940e [1938]).

### Third period: from the object to the subject

Freud's later thoughts on fetishism are to be found in the later editions of “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), and in the seminal papers “Fetishism” (1927e) and “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense” (1940e [1938]). These thoughts do not only refine the explanation of the constitution of the fetish as a sexual object, but also provide insights in the fetishistic subject structure. They can be summarized as follows: two insisting events from childhood (the threat of punishing masturbation with castration and the uncanny perception of the absence of the penis in women) influence the development of the subject after the facts (‘nachträglich’) and are instrumental for the formation of the subject. If the uncanny perception is subject to disavowal (‘Verleugnung’), the outcome will be fetishism, characterized by the formation of a screen memory and the splitting of the ego.

We will first look at the mutual influence of the castration complex and the uncanny perception in Freud's work in general, and then focus on the concepts of ‘disavowal’ and the ‘splitting of the ego’ in the two key texts mentioned above.

#### *Mutual influence of castration complex and uncanny absence*

The refinement of the explanation of the origin of fetishism consists in the elaboration of the ideas of the castration complex and the uncanny absence, and in the analysis of their mutual influence. This mutual influence is only understandable by making use of Freud's



concept of Nachträglichkeit (translated as 'deferred action' or, more precisely, as 'afterwardsness').

In a note to the 1923 edition of the case study of Little Hans, Freud stresses the universality of the castration complex:

Any one who, in analyzing adults, has become convinced of the invariable presence of the castration complex, will of course find difficulty in ascribing its origin to a chance threat – of a kind which is not, after all, of such universal occurrence; he will be driven to assume that children construct this danger for themselves out of the slightest hints, which will never be wanting (1909b, p.8).

But the threat initially stays without effect: "A threat of castration by itself need not produce a great impression. A child will refuse to believe in it, for he cannot easily imagine the possibility of losing such a highly prized part of his body" (1940d, p. 276).

The little boy will continue masturbation as before, and the threat in isolation won't have any effect.

Once more, another example of this idea is to be found in Little Hans:

When he was three and a half his mother found him with his hand on his penis. She threatened him in these words: 'If you do that, I shall send for Dr. A. to cut off your widdler. And then what'll you widdle with?' Hans: 'With my bottom.' He made this reply without having any sense of guilt as yet. But this was the occasion of his acquiring the 'castration complex' (1909b, p. 8).

In isolation, the sight of the absence of the phallus in a woman doesn't need to be traumatic either. The child just thinks: "Her – is still quite small. But when she gets bigger it'll grow all right" (1908c, p. 216).

But if the two events are not traumatic in isolation, how can their combination be? In Freud's work, different occurrences of these two events and their interplay are to be found in several texts. We will try to disentangle their interaction.

In "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908c), where the two events are dealt with in the context of homosexuality, it seems that the castration threat is traumatic on its own, and the horror provoked by the perception of the missing phallus, merely a consequence:

The child, having been mainly dominated by excitations in the penis, will usually have obtained pleasure by stimulating it with his hand; he will have been detected in this by his parents or nurse and terrorized by the threat of having his penis cut off [...] The woman's genitalia, when seen later on, are regarded as a mutilated organ and recall this threat, and they therefore arouse horror instead of pleasure (1908c, p. 217).

In "Leonardo Da Vinci and a memory of his childhood" (1910c), the agency of the events is rendered in a slightly different way. When the boy sees the genitals of little girls, the observation initially stays without result: it only leads to the conclusion that girls have small penises that will grow later. When the boy is threatened with castration, it doesn't produce a traumatic effect, either. It is only in combination with a new observation, after the castration threat, that the uncanny result is produced: "Under the influence of this threat of castration he now sees the notion he has gained of the female genitals in a new light; henceforth he will tremble for his masculinity" (1910c, p. 95).

In "The dissolution of the Oedipus complex" (1924d), the stress is put on the deferred effect of the castration threat:

Sooner or later the child, who is so proud of his possession of a penis, has a view of the genital region of a little girl, and cannot help being convinced of the absence of a penis in a creature who is so like himself. With this, the loss of his own penis becomes imaginable, and the threat of castration takes its deferred effect (1924d, pp. 175-176).

In "Fetishism" (1927e) finally, the agency and chronological order of the events stay the same, but the accent lies on the refusal to believe: "What happened, therefore, was that the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger" (1927e, p. 153).

The different descriptions Freud gives of the agency of the two events seem to suggest an inconsistency, an ambivalence or at least a seemingly contradictory chronological flexibility. It is impossible to account for this seeming contradiction without considering the idea of *Nachträglichkeit* in some detail.

Classically, two interpretations of *Nachträglichkeit* are proposed. The first one is epitomized by the fact that Strachey mostly uses the term 'deferred action' to translate the term in the Standard Edition of Freud's work (Strachey, 1953). *Nachträglichkeit* is interpreted here as a past event that puts another light on a present event. The sense of the causality goes from the past to the present.

The second interpretation is epitomized by the translation of *Nachträglichkeit* by "retrospective attribution", proposed by Thomä & Chesire (1991, pp. 407-424). The causality goes here from the present to the past.

Laplanche, who quotes the aforementioned examples (1999, pp. 264-270), proposes a third translation: "afterwardsness". He defines it as follows:

Experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 111).

But Laplanche and Pontalis' definition, which combines the causality from the past to the present (the 'psychical effectiveness') with the causality from the present to the past (the 'endowment with new meaning'), doesn't suffice either to account for how the events we describe above influence each other. The added complication is this: it is not simply one event that influences another afterwardly, but two events influencing each other afterwardly. We understand *the mutual influence itself* of both events as conferred to them afterwardly. Follows that their chronological order is as such irrelevant. Moreover, it is our vision that the chronological order is not only irrelevant, but that it simply does not

exist: both events are only ordered in time when and if they are constructed during a psychoanalysis. The way Freud speaks about a phantasm in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), may illuminate this idea: “it has never had a real existence. It is never remembered; it has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but it is no less a necessity on that account” (1919e, p. 185).<sup>46</sup>

What are now the effects of the – afterwardly construed – mutual influence of the castration threat and the uncanny perception? Firstly, the child has to deal with the perception that not all human beings have a phallus. Secondly, he has to take position on the issue of castration.

The way the child deals with both issues can lead to dramatically different outcomes, one of which is fetishism, the other ‘normality’. But the reason why a subject ‘chooses’ one outcome rather than another, remains unclear. Freud will never come up with a decent explanation, but minimizes this lack:

Why some people become homosexual as a consequence of that impression [the missing phallus], while others fend it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority surmount it, we are frankly not able to explain [...] We must be content if we can explain what has happened, and may for the present leave on one side the task of explaining why something has not happened (1927e, pp. 154-155).

Till 1927, when Freud writes “Fetishism”, he does not only not answer the question why one of the possible outcomes is selected, but also does not investigate the way in which the fetishistic outcome is not only phenomenologically, but also structurally different from the ‘normal’ one. It is only in his paper on fetishism and in one of his last texts, “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense” (1940e [1938]), that Freud provides the conceptual elements that enable one to understand something of the characteristics of the subject in fetishism, which Freud comes to see as the characteristics of perversion in general. These elements are the screen memory and the splitting of the ego.

### *The paper on fetishism*

“Fetishism” (1927) is the only of Freud’s texts that has fetishism as the main subject. The short text is introduced by a case of fetishism, which Freud calls “The most extraordinary case” (1927e, p. 152) – a fact witnessing to his interest in fetishism. The very short description that Freud provides is worth quoting:

a young man had exalted a certain sort of ‘shine on the nose’ into a fetishistic precondition. The surprising explanation of this was that the patient had been brought up in an English nursery but had later come to Germany, where he forgot his mother-tongue almost completely. The fetish, which originated from his earliest childhood, had to be understood in English, not German. The ‘shine on the nose’ – was in reality a ‘glance at the nose’. The nose was thus the fetish, which, incidentally, he endowed at will with the luminous shine which was not perceptible to others (1927e, p. 152).

In his analysis, Freud comes up with the following interpretation, based on his theory of the ‘uncanny perception’:

the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ (1927e, p. 153).

It is here that Freud, for the first time, clearly extends his theory of the fetish as a substitute for woman’s missing phallus to fetishism in general, and not only to foot fetishists or hair despoilers: “the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and – for reasons familiar to us – does not want to give up” (1927e, pp. 152-153). It is the same explanation he had ventured in 1910 in his text on Da Vinci to account for the homosexuality of the artist. But in 1910, as Freud admitted in a footnote, he does not give any reasons for this interpretation (1927e, p. 153).

Further in the text, Freud analyzes in detail *why* and *how* the boy refuses to take cognizance of the uncanny perceptual fact. Doing so, he introduces two important ideas: firstly, a distinction between the vicissitudes of the idea and the vicissitudes of the affect, secondly the concept of 'disavowal':<sup>47</sup>

[one] would say in this case that the boy 'scotomizes' his perception of the woman's lack of a penis [but] if we wanted to differentiate more sharply between the vicissitude of the idea as distinct from that of the affect, and reserve the word 'Verdrängung' ['repression'] for the affect, then the correct German word for the vicissitude of the idea would be 'Verleugnung' ['disavowal']. 'Scotomization' seems to me particularly unsuitable, for it suggests that the perception is entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in the retina. In the situation we are considering, on the contrary, we see that the perception has persisted, and that a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal (1927e, pp. 153-154).

Freud interprets the fetishist's position as a compromise between the disavowed idea and the persistence of the perception:

In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish, a compromise has been reached [...] in his mind the woman has got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor (1927e, p. 154).

Picking up the idea of a 'symbolic connection' from "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d) – and indirectly building on Binet's 'association of ideas' – Freud describes the fetish as a *screen memory*, onto which the sexual value of the expected phallus is displaced.

The notion of 'screen memory' appears already in the context of fetishism in a note to the "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" added in 1920: "behind the first recollection of the fetish's appearance there lies a submerged and forgotten phase of sexual development. The fetish, like a 'screen memory', represents this phase and is thus a remnant and precipitate of it" (1905d, p. 154).

In 1927, this idea is elaborated and refined, but without the use of the term 'screen memory':

mostly, when the fetish is instituted some process occurs, which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. The subject's interest comes to a halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish (1927e, p. 155).

And what is this last impression? Freud answers, and points at the origin of fetishism with clinical precision:

the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish – or a part of it – to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up; fur and velvet – as has long been suspected – are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member; pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic (1927e, p. 155).

In other words, the film breaks during the projection, and the spectator leaves the movie theater with an overexposed snapshot, the last image before the traumatic unraveling he disavows having witnessed.

But what is the function of this overexposed snapshot? By sticking to the image of woman as phallic, by disavowing sexual difference, the subject protects himself from the fear of castration, and by extension escapes the 'standard' regulation of sexual enjoyment:

We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it [...] The horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute (1927e, p. 154).

Thus, the fetish does not only establish the continuation of a triumph, but also of a horror. In the process, the subject saves his own penis from castration, and regulates his sexual

enjoyment according to his proper laws: he can proceed undisturbed and unpunished with masturbation. But the price to pay for the relative benefits of the fetishistic solution is high: what Freud calls later a ‘splitting of the ego’: “a rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on” (1940e, p. 273).

This rift is the consequence of a double action: *disavowal* of the reality that women are castrated, and *repression* of the affect accompanying this uncanny perception. The repression can be seen as the overexposure after the facts of the uncanny scene, as a refusal or an incapacity to integrate the content of that scene; the disavowal can be compared to the breaking of the film, but a breaking that would occur only *after* the projection of the uncanny scene. What stays is an overexposed snapshot: the last image in which woman can be seen as phallic.

Before we study “Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense” (1940e [1938]), we will return to the small case-study that opens “Fetishism” (1927). When one finishes reading the paper, one thing stands out: Freud doesn’t discuss what he calls “the most extraordinary case” in any detail; it is as if the case is not really integrated in the text. Most striking is the omission of an explanation of how a *word* or a *singular trait* can take on the function of a fetish.<sup>48</sup>

But let us briefly reconstruct the case – and Freud’s interpretation of it. A child has an uncanny perception of women’s missing penis. The idea that women miss a penis, is disavowed. The sexual value attached to the expected penis is transferred to the last impression before the uncanny absence, in this case, to women’s nose. When the child hears the phrase ‘a glance at the nose’, a linguistic processing of the fetish takes place: the phrase stands in for the perception of the nose of the mother. When the child changes language, the phrase ‘Ein Glanz auf der Nase’ (‘a shine on the nose’) comes to stand for the phrase ‘a glance at the nose’. By a homophonic mistranslation of ‘glance’



into 'Glanze' ('shine' in German), the 'shine' is added to the fetish: the fetish becomes a *shiny* nose.

What does this show? That the construction of a fetish is a particular strategy to deal with a traumatic perception that concerns sexual difference, which uses linguistic means. The merit of this observation is double: firstly, it shows that the perception lying at the base of fetishism is a traumatic one, secondly, it gives a clear and detailed description of *how* what Binet called an 'association of ideas' and a 'symbolic connection' works and develops into a fetish.

Freud shows that the fetish has to be deciphered. In that, it is coded message. As so often in his work, Freud interprets the problem explicitly as a problem of *meaning*, as a *language* problem.<sup>49</sup> As Miller puts it: "This fetish [...], as the cause of desire, is openly illustrated in this example where not only it is an almost pointless thing, or a substance almost immaterial, but it also depends on a "signifier" play" ("You are the Woman...", n.d.). This sign-character of the fetish will be important to Lacan's theory of fetishism. While some commentators give decent interpretations of Freud's paper on fetishism,<sup>50</sup> to our knowledge only Lacanian interpretations mention this sign-character.<sup>51</sup>

### *The splitting of the ego*

Apart from the characterization of the origin of fetishism, and the elaboration of some language-like characteristics of the fetish, the theoretical importance of the paper on fetishism lies also in the fact that Freud develops the idea of a splitting of the ego as a consequence of disavowal. It is important to understand that, to Freud, this splitting can occur in neurosis, in psychosis and in what he calls 'cases like neurosis' – under which Freud puts fetishism, and by extension perversion in general: "It must not be thought that fetishism presents an exceptional case as regards a splitting of the ego; it is merely a particularly favorable subject for studying the question" (1940a, p. 203).

Freud already flirted with the same idea in “Neurosis and Psychosis” (1924b). There, he defines both clinical structures clearly: “neurosis is the result of a conflict between the ego and its Id, whereas psychosis is the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relations between the ego and the external world” (1924b, p. 149). Further in the same text, Freud admits, however, that ego-conflicts can also lead to a certain *adaptation* of the ego in such a way that a *rupture* of the relationship with the Id or with reality is avoided. In the process, the ego is *cleaved* or *divided*: “it will be possible for the ego to avoid a rupture in any direction by deforming itself, by submitting to encroachments on its own unity and even perhaps by effecting a cleavage or division of itself” (1924b, pp. 152-153).

Freud, still in “Neurosis and Psychosis”, links this ‘division’ with the ‘inconsistencies’ he meets in perversions: “In this way the inconsistencies, eccentricities and follies of men would appear in a similar light to their sexual perversions, through the acceptance of which they spare themselves repressions” (1924b, p. 153).

In 1927 however, as we saw, Freud comes to use the concept ‘disavowal’ to explain this divide in perversion. He does so by referring to two similar cases – about one of which he clearly says that it concerns a neurotic. In both cases, the patients...

had failed to take cognizance of the death of [their] beloved father [...] It was only one current in their mental life that had not recognized their father’s death; there was another current which took full account of that fact. The attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality existed side by side” (1927e, p. 156).

Just like in fetishism, in the two former cases an important piece of reality is disavowed by the ego, resulting in a ‘split’. In this ‘split’, two, seemingly contradictory currents can coexist: “In one of my two cases this split had formed the basis of a moderately severe obsessional neurosis. The patient oscillated in every situation in life between two assumptions: the one, that his father was still alive and was hindering his activities; the

other, opposite one, that he was entitled to regard himself as his father's successor" (1927e, p. 156).

So, even if Freud calls fetishism merely a particularly favorable subject for studying the question of the splitting of the ego, it is clear that – the other way around – a study of the splitting of the ego – and of disavowal – is particularly favorable to throw light upon the question of fetishism.

The short case Freud focuses on in this text is a classic example of fetishism, which he describes using the theoretical framework he fine-tunes in his paper on fetishism. In the terms of a choice between giving in to an instinctual demand – the base of psychosis – and obeying to a prohibition of it by reality – neurosis –, he depicts the subject in fetishism as the one that simultaneously chooses both alternatives:

On the one hand, with the help of certain mechanisms he rejects reality and refuses to accept any prohibition; on the other hand, in the same breath he recognizes the danger of reality, takes over the fear of that danger as a pathological symptom and tries subsequently to divest himself of the fear (1940d, p. 275).

The potentially fruitful notion of the pervert's refusal to accept prohibition is unfortunately left undeveloped by Freud. For Lacan, it will be a key to think perversion differently.

The differentiation of three kinds of conflicts (between ego and Id – between ego and reality – internal to the ego), is, however, a key advance. It is the ground for not only distinguishing neurosis from psychosis, but for distinguishing perversion – typified by fetishism – as a third broad psychopathological category in its own right – something Lacan will later do with his ideas on perversion as a structure.

Apart from this unclearly stated, but major contribution to the study of the perversions, no new ideas appear in this very short text. It consists of a mere three pages, and is mostly

a recapitulation of Freud's late ideas on fetishism. Still, one small shift of focus is worth mentioning. That what Freud describes as "a very ingenious solution of the difficulty" (p. 275), as a "way of dealing with reality, which almost deserves to be described as artful" (p. 277), is not only paid for by a splitting of the ego. The fetishistic – and by extension the perverse – subject suffers from a pathological symptom as well: the fear for castration crystallizes into a symptom and always reappears, as Freud's typical case study shows: "simultaneously with the creation of his fetish, he developed an intense fear of his father punishing him, which it required the whole force of his masculinity to master and overcompensate" (p. 277). This fear of being punished by the father provides the link with the masochistic phantasm "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e), which we deal with in the chapter on sadism and masochism.

In this third period of his thinking about fetishism, Freud accomplishes two things. Firstly, he crystallizes his theory of the origin of fetishism and enlarges it to perversion in general. Secondly, he gives insights into the particularity of the *subject* in fetishism: the fetishist is characterized by a split ego, regulates his sexual enjoyment around a distinctive trait with a sign character – one can't help but think of a signifier –, disavows sexual differentiation, but is traversed, in spite of the fact that his solution is 'artful', by an unconscious fear of castration. Remarkably, while Freud seems to understand fetishism better than his precursor sexologists, one characteristic we found in Charcot's description seems to be absent in Freud's: the specific relationship the pervert has with the law, for the understanding of which the study of sadism and masochism yield richer results than the study of fetishism, as we will see later.

## Conclusion

In this part on Freud and fetishism, we first studied the most important sources Freud bases himself on to deal with fetishism: three key texts from Charcot & Magnan, Binet and Krafft-Ebing. Central for them are the attempt at categorization of the perversions, a fascination with raw case-material and a focus on degeneracy and heredity as causes.

But we also highlighted passages in their texts that, while their authors do not develop them, contain observations, concepts or ideas that constitute the fertile soil on which Freud will build his theories.

Their basic insight can be put as follows: the awakening of genital excitation is associated with a contingent exterior fact, that crystallizes into a fetish, which operates as a sign in a language-based scenario that is instrumental for the regulation of sexual enjoyment.

Secondly, we examined Freud's ideas on fetishism, which develop in three phases, in which he gradually shifts focus from the study of the *object* of fetishism to the study of the *subject* in fetishism.

In his first period of theorizing about fetishism, Freud stays largely tributary to the sexologists. But the novel idea of the fetish representing the woman's missing penis makes here its first appearance and is combined with the idea of a 'symbolic connection', already to be found in Binet. In the second period, the concepts of the castration complex and the rejection of the absence of a penis in woman see the light. In the third and final period, these concepts are articulated with fetishism in two key texts: "Fetishism" (1927e) and "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1940e [1938]). In these papers, Freud crystallizes his theory on the origin of fetishism and enlarges it to perversion in general. Yet, this is not all: Freud then also shifts focus from the object of fetishism to the subject in fetishism, whereby he discerns three main characteristics: a rift in the ego, a language-based regulatory mechanism of sexual enjoyment and a disavowal of sexual differentiation.

However innovative Freud's views may have been, there are some less solid points in his theory. Three of these deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, Freud never comes up with an explanation of the 'why' of the fetishistic 'choice', leaving a serious gap in the understanding of fetishism. Secondly, the link between language and sexuality or perversion is pointed out, but stays conceptually underdeveloped. Thirdly, Freud never develops the idea of a specific relationship between the fetishist and the law.

In the next chapter we show how Lacan expands the understanding of fetishism and tackles these three lacunae in Freud's theory.

## PART 2

Lacan on fetishism: the perversion of perversions

“What is interesting with the fetish, is that it introduces an object in the relationship of the subject to the Other. It is here that the veil is drawn back on the dimension of the object as cause of desire” (Nguyễn, 2008, p. 47).<sup>52</sup>



## Introduction

In this part, we will focus on Lacan's theory of fetishism and on the sources Lacan bases himself on while elaborating this theory.

Until the late 1950s, Lacan considers fetishism to be the paradigmatic perversion,<sup>53</sup> whereas the emphasis shifts towards masochism and sadism from the moment he starts to theorize the object *a* during the early 1960's (Nobus, 2000, p. 53).

The kernel of Lacan's view is that fetishism is an attempt to deal with the way the object lacks in privation. This view is developed mostly throughout Seminar IV, "The Object Relation" (1956), where he addresses the subject of fetishism for the first time in any depth.<sup>54</sup> It is partly driven by a critique of the object relation theory, as it was propagated by, amongst others, Melanie Klein, William R. D. Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott. In post-war France, it was very popular, amongst others through the writings of Maurice Bouvet.<sup>55</sup>

Lacan's critique results in his own object relation theory, or better: in his own theory of object lack. It is in the context of object lack that Lacan thinks fetishism, as a specific way to deal with privation, one of the three modes in which the object can lack.

To come to a more complete understanding of Lacan's theory of object lack, we first analyze in quite some detail its sources in Lacan's early text, "The Family Complexes" (1938). There, subject development is described as deploying across three complexes: the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex.

Next, focusing on Seminar IV (1956), we will show the parallel of these three complexes with the three moments of object lack: real privation, imaginary frustration and symbolic castration.<sup>56</sup> We confront our interpretations with the readings of Gorog and Chiesa.

It is the development of his object lack theory that allows Lacan to describe fetishism as a specific kind of object relation next to phobia and normality. According to Lacan, fetishism is one of the possible positions of the subject in relation to privation. At one point during development, the subject finds itself in an untenable, anxiety-provoking situation: in the corner of an imaginary triangle of which the other corners are the mother and the phallus. Without the introduction of a paternal fourth term, the only possible solution to this untenable situation consists in being the phallus for the mother, which, for Lacan, comes to characterize perversion in general.

Finally, we will focus on how Lacan expands his notion of fetishism. Taking up Freud's – and indirectly, Binet's – idea of the sign-character of the fetish, Lacan situates the fetish as petrified between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. He conceptualizes what lies beyond the fetish, develops the perverse phantasm, and uses the concepts of screen memory and of the veil. Last but not least, mostly in Seminar V (1957), he puts the fetish in a linguistic context and describes it as a metonymy.

### The theory of object lack

As said, a detailed understanding of Lacan's theory of object lack, which he develops in the first part of the fourth Seminar (1956), is necessary to understand properly how he deals with fetishism, which he defines as an attempt to come to terms with a specific kind of object lack (p. 85). It can't be stressed enough that object lack theory will be the framework, the condition of possibility for Lacan to think fetishism.

We will prepare the field by defining in a first paragraph how to understand the notion of object. We will follow Lacan describing three ways Freud uses to think the object. The kernel is the idea that the object is always already missing, but that it is precisely around this lack that the subject constitutes itself and its reality. We will see as well how Lacan introduces his views on fetishism and on phobia by using the fetishistic object and the phobic object as privileged examples of how the subject is constituted around a lack. This

trajectory foreshadows Lacan's development of the object *a* as the lacking object. Ultimately, this development will lead Lacan, years later, to think perversion differently, on the basis of the object *a* in sadism and masochism.

In Seminar IV (1956), Lacan deals with the constitution of the subject in relation to its lack from a logical, structural point of view. We will take time to show how this view finds its roots in two other, more factual, chronological and developmental points of view. The first important source is Freud's theory of the psycho-sexual development of the individual with the well-known oral, anal and phallic stages. The second important source is Lacan's own early text "The Family Complexes" (1938), where the author discerns the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex.

As Lacan elaborates on the object relations, which he sees as ways to relate to object lack, he describes three forms of lack which constitute crucial logical moments in the constitution of the subject. Even though Lacan will abandon this framework almost entirely, his theory of object lack is crucial to provide a framework to his early elaboration of fetishism as the paradigmatic perversion. Safouan finds in Seminar IV (1956) "trials of Lacan to elaborate a theory of perversions in general and of the fetishistic object in particular" (2001, p. 64).<sup>57</sup>

The conceptual tools Lacan uses for this description, are very intricate and demand quite some elucidation. Lacan summarizes them in a table which serves as the red thread through the development of object relations. We will comment on all the concepts used in this crucial table. First, we will deal with the three forms of object lack: imaginary frustration, real privation and symbolic castration. Secondly, we will comment on the three kinds of phallus Lacan distinguishes: the imaginary, symbolic and real phallus. Thirdly, we will describe the objects that lack in frustration, privation and castration: respectively a real, a symbolic and an imaginary object. Finally, we will examine the agents of

frustration, privation and castration: the symbolic mother, the imaginary father and the real father respectively.

In the fourth paragraph, equipped with the conceptual framework mentioned above, we will provide a close reading of the most important passages of the first part of Seminar IV (1956). We will try to elucidate the main argument of the complex text and will put the concepts we described in a static fashion to dynamic use. Our main point of attention, of course, will be fetishism, seen by Lacan as one of the possible outcomes of subject constitution. But this will not be possible without providing a detailed analysis of the rich context in which Lacan embeds his analysis. This close-reading will provide us with a detailed understanding of the way in which the different kinds of object lack can be logically ordered in the development of the individual, and, apart from fetishism, on the other outcomes this development can result in. The benefit of including the context in our analysis will be that we avoid the pitfall of mixing up the perspectives of structural subject constitution and the development of the individual.

## The object

In his fourth Seminar, Lacan takes, as almost always in his first Seminars, his starting point in Freud's texts. To be specific, he analyzes Freud's different conceptions of the object. In "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915c), Freud defines the object as follows:

The object [Objekt] of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim [Ziel]. It is what is most variable about an instinct and is not originally connected with it, but becomes assigned to it only in consequence of being peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible (1915c, p. 122).

In other words, for Freud, an object as such does not exist; all objects are always and only objects in relation to a subject of a drive.<sup>58</sup>

Lacan radicalizes Freud's concept of the object to such an extent that there is not only no object as such, but even no subject as such. He sees the subject as evolving through and consisting out of a succession of different ways of relating to object *lack*:

We can only present the problem of the object relations correctly when we start from a certain framework that needs to be considered fundamental for our understanding. This framework, or the first of these frameworks, is that in the human world, the structure and the start of the objectal organization is the lack of the object. This object lack, we need to conceive of it at its different levels in the subject (Lacan, 1956, pp. 55-56).<sup>59</sup>

In order to develop his view on object relations, starting from Freud's definition of the object in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915c), Lacan analyzes three key aspects of Freud's view on the object (1956, pp. 14-18): the object as always already lost, the relation to reality and the identification with the object.

In the chapter "The finding of an object", in the third of the "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d), Freud stresses that every attempt to find the object is always and only the result of a tendency towards a *lost* object, an object one wants to *find back*. This lost object is the object of the child's first satisfactions:

At a time at which the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of his mother's breast. It is only later that the instinct loses that object [...] The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it (Freud, 1905c, p. 222).

Lacan characterizes this finding back of a lost object as an impossible repetition. The impossibility of this repetition creates a tension within the object relation. Every rediscovered object will fail to completely stand in for the original lost object, and therefore it will fail to bring total satisfaction. It is this tension within the object relation that Lacan calls lack. The object is thus constituted by a failing attempt to find back the original object lost during weaning. The result is that the subject is always characterized by a lack, and that there is no such thing as an object that can fill this lack (Lacan, 1956, p 15).

Secondly, Lacan points out that Freud implicitly speaks about the object every time the notion of 'reality' comes into play (p. 14). For Freud, the notion of the object is situated within a conflicting relation of the subject with its world (p. 16).

Freud articulates this conflicting relation mainly around the concepts of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, around respectively a hallucinatory and an autonomous object.

The pleasure principle tries to deal with the conflict by repeating the original lost satisfaction in a hallucinatory fashion (p. 16). We could interpret this as the pleasure principle constructing a 'hallucinatory object', an object constituted on the background of the drives.

The reality principle, on the other side, tries to deal with the conflict by repeating the original satisfaction by a detour by reality, which Lacan describes here as an autonomous organization or structure, implicating that what the reality principle grasps, is fundamentally different from that which is desired (p. 16). We could interpret this as the reality principle constructing an autonomous object, an object constituted on the background of common reality.

While there is a gap between both principles, they are not detachable: they implicate each other in a dialectic relation (p. 16).

Through this – slightly forced – reading of Freud, Lacan stresses that the constitution of an object, and by extension the subject-object relation as such, is always based on an attempt to reduce a primitive lack, and that this relationship to this lack is constitutive for the subject's drives and for the subject's reality. This is one of the basic intuitions of Lacan: the subject is constructed around a hole.

Thirdly, Freud also deals with the object in the context of what Lacan calls "the ambivalence of certain relationships" (p. 14), that is the fact that the subject makes itself

into an object for the other. In other words, there is a certain type of relationships in which reciprocity by means of an object is patent and even formative (p.14).

This is what Lacan calls imaginary reciprocity: in every subject-object relation, the place of the terms in the relation can be seen as being simultaneously occupied by the subject. This means that there is an identification with the object at the bottom of every relation to the object. It is precisely this reciprocity that can be found in its pure form in pre-genital relations, which are always tainted by an identification of the subject with its partner, in an ambiguous reciprocity of the positions, as in seeing-being seen, attacking-being attacked, passive-active (p.17).

It is this relationship of reciprocity between subject and object, this mirror-relationship that Lacan dealt with in his theory of the mirror-stage. By recognizing his own image and by the captivation that this includes, the child learns the distance between his internal tensions and the identification to his image.

In short, Lacan describes three perspectives on the object: the fact that it is always missing, the fact that it is situated within a conflicting relation between the subject on the one hand and its drives and reality on the other hand, and finally the fact that there is a relation of reciprocity at the bottom of the object relation. Together, they seem to define the object in a diffuse, roundabout manner. But what is common to all objects? The fact that they are instrumental, that they have a regulating function: "The object [...] is instrumental in masking the fundamental anxiety at the bottom of the relation of the subject with the world in different stages of its development" (p. 22).<sup>60</sup>

It is in order to illustrate this crucial view that the object is instrumental in regulating anxiety, Lacan turns to an analysis of phobia and fetishism.

In phobias, there is no direct relation between the phobic object and the fear that colors it. In other words: if a child, having never seen a real lion, suffers from a lion phobia, it is clear that there is no direct relation between the image of a lion and the fear it evokes. Moreover, claiming such a relation would include claiming the existence of a primitive object that is the source of anxiety. For Lacan, there is no primitive object: as for Freud, it is always already lost. Instead, Lacan interprets the phobic object as a protection against anxiety:

The object encloses the subject in a circle within which it puts itself at shelter from his own fears. Fear gives the object its role at a determined moment of a certain crisis of the subject, but that doesn't make the object typical nor evolutive. Instead, the phobia permits us to grasp something about a certain relation to anxiety (p. 22).<sup>61</sup>

The same goes for fetishism: if a subject has a shoe as sexual fetish, there is clearly no direct relation between the image of a shoe and the lust it provokes. Referring back to Freud, Lacan stresses that the function of the fetish is also a protective, regulatory one. The fetish fulfills the function of protection against castration anxiety, as far as this anxiety is linked to the perception of the absence of the phallic organ of the feminine subject and to the negation of this absence (p. 23).<sup>62</sup>

We will elaborate this later, but concentrate for the moment on what is common between the phobic and fetishistic objects. Both are structured around the same kernel of anxiety, and function as a protective strategy against the intrusion of the drives and of reality, as a guarantee for the subsistence of the subject. They have a certain function of complementation in relation to something that presents itself as a hole, as an abyss and an absence. This makes Lacan claim there is no privileged object at all; no object has the property of regularizing the relations with all other objects (p. 24). Just as money doesn't have value as such, but only in a certain context, objects don't have value as such; objects are constructions which order, organize and articulate a certain lived experience.



But what is the difference between fetish and phobic object? It is specifically to answer this question, and to show that their construction is an outcome of a specific developmental path of the subject, that Lacan elaborates his object relations theory, centered around the concept of lack. As said, each form of lack can be described as a crisis in the development of the subject. But before we turn to an analysis of the conceptual tools Lacan uses for this description, we will study some important sources on which Lacan bases himself to construct his theory.

### Sources for a developmental view

Although Lacan does not specifically say so, it is quite clear that his theory of object lack is developed on the basis of material from Freud, but also from Lacan's own previous work.

Of course, Freud's theory of subject-development through the three libidinal stages is omnipresent in the background of Lacan's analysis, and thus a main source for the object lack theory. But there is more: in the Standard Edition of Freud's work (Strachey, 1953), we find the terms frustration, privation and castration – which are at the center of Lacan's object relation theory. In the Standard Edition, these terms translate respectively the original German *Versagung*, *Entbehrung* and *Kastration*. However, as we will argue, there is no one-on-one relation between the use Lacan makes of the terms frustration, privation and castration and the mentioned terms in Freud's work.

Secondly, we find another important source in Lacan's own early text "The Family Complexes" (1938), where he discusses the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex. We find obvious parallels between these complexes and the three ways in which an object can lack, which will enlighten our interpretation of Lacan's object lack theory.

Having, in the following paragraphs, a closer look at these sources, will enable us to situate the development of Lacan's concepts frustration, privation and castration in the context of their genesis.

### *Sources in Freud's work*

Freud's psycho-sexual developmental model, which describes the oral, anal and phallic stages, is so generally known, that we do not develop this source here. For a good overview, we refer to Laplanche and Pontalis' "The Language of Psychoanalysis" (1973).

Let's turn to the terms frustration, privation and castration in the Standard Edition of Freud's work. Castration, to begin with, is omnipresent in Freud's work. In the Standard Edition, we find quite some uses of the term frustration, and now and then the term privation is to be found as well. However, we need to point out the weakness of some of these translations. Obviously, castration is a sound, literal, translation of Kastration. If we translate *Entbehrung* literally, we get deprivation, while privation is a possible equivalent, as are want and hardship. The case of *Versagung* is a bit more complex: we find refusal, denial and, also, *privation* as most current translations. To translate *Versagung* as frustration is *not* a neutral option. When the Standard Edition was published (from 1956 till 1974), frustration was already a popular term in psychoanalysis, certainly in object relation theory. Note also that the word *frustrieren* exists in German, although solely as a verb. Moreover, on one occasion, Freud uses the neologism *frustrane* to refer to frustrated excitation.<sup>63</sup>

In Freud's work, these terms are almost always used in their everyday significations, mostly in the context of sexuality. But it is interesting to see that in "The Future of an Illusion" (1927c), the concepts of *Versagung* and *Entbehrung* actually get defined. Freud writes: "For the sake of a uniform terminology we will describe the fact that an instinct

cannot be satisfied as 'frustration' [Versagung], the regulation by which this frustration is established as 'prohibition' [Verbot] and the condition which is produced by the prohibition as 'privation' [Entbehrung] (p. 10).

For the main argument of "The Future of an Illusion" (1927c), these definitions are of no great importance. But it is interesting to see the differentiation of frustration as a drive that *cannot* be satisfied, the *prohibition* of the satisfaction of the drive, and its resulting condition of privation. Further in the same work, Freud names the drives that are subject to frustration, prohibition and privation: cannibalistic, murderous, and incestuous wishes (p. 11). These wishes are clearly parallel to Freud's three libidinal stages: the cannibalistic drive to the oral stage, the murderous drive to the (often termed sadistic) anal stage and the incestuous drive to the phallic stage. In other words, the notions of frustration, prohibition and privation are linked to the subject's inherently unsatisfactory relationship to the drives.

The important point here, is to keep in mind that when Lacan uses the terms castration, frustration and privation, while the terms do not strictly cover Freud's, nor the terms, nor their link with the libidinal stages are new. Moreover, it is this parallelism that underlays Lacan's whole approach to what he calls the "The Family Complexes" (1938). Accordingly, we claim that this text can be seen as Lacan's attempt to rewrite Freud's theory of psycho-sexual development.

#### *The second source: The Family Complexes*

"The Family Complexes" (1938), an early work of Lacan, was conceived as a sociologic article on the family for an Encyclopedia, the outline of which was sketched by the psychologist Henri Wallon. The text, without explicitly mentioning to do so, builds on Lacan's conception of the mirror stage and places it in a more complete developmental context: after weaning and before the Oedipus. Its main part consists in a description of

the subject's evolution through three complexes: the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex. Its basic claim is that man is characterized by a paradoxal instinct-economy; in other words, that we are more marked by culture than by nature (pp.5-6).<sup>64</sup>

To describe the development of this paradoxal instinct-economy, Lacan introduces the complicated concept of 'complex', which is far removed from Freud's use of the term and almost impossible to understand without knowledge of Lacan's ulterior work. This is true for the whole article. As Miller puts it: "Today, one can only read this text retrospectively" (2005, n. p.).

The text starts from the – as Miller says: tortuous – definition of the complex: it "links in a fixed form a group of reactions", it "reproduces a certain reality of the environment", and its form "represents this reality at a given stage in psychic development". In its activity, "it repeats in real life the reality that has been thus fixed every time there occur the particular experiences that demand a higher objectification of this reality" (p. 12).

If we read – retrospectively – these particular experiences as intrusions of the Real, and these 'objectifications' as the development of the objects *a* in response to these intrusions, the definition becomes clearer. The complexes can then be read as phases of subject-development that consist in attempts of the subject to deal with the intrusion of the Real, and that result in the 'creation' of objects *a*; each stage has then its typical object.

The fact that Lacan describes the formation of the complexes as "the work of a dialectical process that makes each new form arise from the conflicts between the preceding one and the real", which results in "the individual integration of objectifying forms" (p. 12) corroborates our interpretation; the developmental process is a dialectical one, in which an ambient ('real') element provokes a crisis in an otherwise stable state, here called complex.

Lacan accentuates three aspects of the complex: it is dominated by culture; it is representative of an object and it is a manifestation of an objective lack (p. 12).

At the cultural aspect, we see the precursor of the insistence of the Symbolic, which explains why the instinct-economy is paradoxical in humans. The fact that it is representative for an object, comes from Freud and prefigures, we claim, the different forms of the objet *a* – breast, fecal matter, phallus, gaze and voice.

The idea of deficiency, which is the chosen translation for the French ‘*carence*’, and comes very close to the concept of lack that will be so crucial for the whole of Lacan’s work, is already present as a productive and driving factor.<sup>65</sup> This notion will be the hinge on which Lacan will develop his theory of object lack in Seminar IV (1956).

We’ll now have a brief look at how Lacan describes the three complexes, which he deals with in a strict chronological order.

### The weaning complex

While dealing with weaning, Lacan speaks of a more ancient crisis which he calls “more painful and of greater vital importance”: the one that, at birth, “separates the infant from the womb, a premature separation from which comes a malaise that no maternal care can compensate for” (p. 20). This mythically perfect stage before birth will play a crucial role in Lacan’s later work, notably with the concept of the lamella in Seminar XI (1964).

It is only after this – unnamed – birth complex that the weaning complex appears; it “fixes the feeding relationship in the psyche in the parasitic form that the needs of the human infant being demand. It represents the primordial form of the maternal imago” (p. 14).

It is the refusal of the weaning which founds the positive of the complex: the imago of the feeding relation that it tries to reestablish. Lacan stresses that in this stage, which he places before the sixth month, sensations are not yet sufficiently coordinated in order to

come to a recognition of one's body, nor of the notion of what is exterior to it. Follows that the weaning stage is anterior to the formation of the object. He adds that it looks like its contents cannot be represented in consciousness, and seems to confer to this imago of the feeding relation the status of imaginary proto-object (pp. 17-19).

In order to explain how the child overcomes this stage, Lacan takes up Freud's concept of sublimation: "the imago must be sublimated so that new relationships can be introduced with the social group and new complexes integrated into the psyche" (p. 21). Weaning, Lacan says, is or accepted (sublimated) or rejected. When the child fails to overcome this stage, when weaning is rejected, the result is catastrophic: "the imago, which is salutary in its origins, becomes death bearing" (p. 21).

We find the signs of such a 'failed' weaning in a quite specific clinical phenomenon, i.e. non-violent suicide, with mental anorexia as type example: "by abandoning himself to death the subject is attempting to rediscover the imago of his mother" (p. 21-22).

To resume: before the weaning complex, Lacan identifies a first, intra-uterine stage, an objectless stage in which there is no lack. He identifies birth as a first crisis, and the ensuing 'malaise' as a first form of lack. After lactation, which can be seen as a second stable stage, weaning introduces a second crisis. As a reaction, a 'maternal imago' is formed, which has the role of imaginary proto-object. In Lacan's object lack theory, as we will see, the weaning stage will find its parallel in the form of object lack that is characterized by frustration.

### The intrusion complex

Lacan's account of the intrusion complex is confusing, but when we stress the dialectical fashion of Lacan's reasoning and split his account in stable stages and crises, we get more of a grip on it. The intrusion complex is constructed around two typical moments or that are crucial for the infant in the period between 6 and 24 months, when the complex appears. The first moment happens when an infant recognizes itself in the mirror for the

first time, the second when an already weaned child sees his sibling being breastfed and reacts with jealousy. The first one introduces the mirror-stage, that can be seen as a stable stage, while the second one, the intrusion complex proper, can be seen as a new crisis. Lacan alternatively calls this moment the fraternal complex (p. 34).

Lacan starts his analysis of this complex with a description of how an infant between 6 and 24 months relates to other infants of the same age: reactions of parade, seduction or despotism are objectively observable. These reactions are not inter-individual, but intra-individual conflicts, in which one child identifies with the other without being able to make the difference between self and other: “each partner confuses the other’s role with his own and identifies with him” (p. 25). In other words; there is not yet an other as such, nor is there a self.<sup>66</sup>

It is precisely this identification that sustains the primordial aggression in this phase. Lacan draws the parallel with what Freud says about the anal stage: “analytic doctrine, by characterizing as sado-masochistic the typical libidinal tendency of this stage, certainly underlines that here aggressiveness dominates the affective economy, but it also makes clear that it is always both active and passive, that is, underpinned by an identification with the other who is the object of the violence” (p. 27).

Lacan sees this aggression not only as subordinated to identification, but also as a repetition of an earlier lack: “The image of the unweaned sibling only attracts a special aggression because it repeats in the subject the imago of the maternal situation and with it the desire for death. This phenomenon is secondary to identification” (p. 28).

To introduce the mirror stage, Lacan stresses certain effects of the premature birth of the human baby: discordance of drives and functions and a fragmented body image. He sees the psyche as directed towards a ‘pasting together’ of the fragmented body, while reality orders itself, reflecting the forms of the body, which give in some way the model of all objects. The recognition of the image of the child in the mirror crystallizes this ‘pasting

together'. It is characterized by "a sudden manifestation of adaptive behaviour (in this case a gesture referring to some part of his body) followed by a jubilant expenditure of energy which objectively indicates triumph" (p. 30). Lacan sees the jubilant character of the experience as the sign that the child believes to have found back the lost 'affective unity' in his mirror image, which he represents from then onwards as his identity.

The intrusion complex proper is described as the crisis that ends the mirror stage. It is here that the rival appears as a third party, breaking the dual relationship between mother and child. The prototype for Lacan is to be found in Saint Augustine's description of a childhood scene where a baby is jealous of his younger brother being breast-fed: "Myself have seen and known even a baby envious; it could not speak, yet it turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother" (Saint Augustine, Confessions, Book I, VII).

From the mirror phase onwards, this reaction of jealous identification takes on a new aspect. Lacan describes it in couples of children between 6 and 24 months who do not differ more than two and a half months. Here, both partners see the situation as one with two possible outcomes, as an alternative. From this stage onwards, the recognition of a rival starts; that is to say, of an other as object, which Lacan calls the imago of the double (p. 30):

The ego is constructed at the same time as the other while the drama of jealousy is being acted out. Because there is in the subject a tendency which draws satisfaction from relating to his mirror-image, the ego is a dissonance introduced into this specular satisfaction. It implies the introduction of a third object which replaces the affective confusion and the ambiguities of the mirror stage with the competition of a triangular situation (p. 33).

Accordingly, Lacan sees the ego as post-mirror stage. In the mirror stage, a stable state of concordance is reached between the subject and its mirror-image. The subject, one could say, identifies in an autistic fashion with itself. It is only the introduction of a third object – of a sibling – in the field of vision of the infant that will allow him to enter what



Lacan will much later call the symbolic order, based on the notions of exchange and contract:

And so the subject, who through identification is committed to jealousy, arrives at a new alternative where the fate of reality is played out. Either he goes back to the maternal object and insists on refusing the real and on destroying the other; or he is led to some other object and accepts it in the form characteristic of human knowledge, that is, as a communicable object, since competition implies both rivalry and agreement. But at the same time, he recognises the other with whom he will either fight or enter into a contract. In short he discovers both the other person and the object as socialised phenomena (p. 33).

But what happens if something goes wrong in this stage? Lacan is not very clear on this, and mentions a plethora of possible clinical pictures: a regression into schizophrenic psychosis, perverse impulses, an obsessional culpability, homosexuality, sexual fetishism, paranoia, etc.

Fetishism is here only mentioned sideways, in the list of possible failures of the intrusion complex. It is interesting however to see what Lacan thinks about the topic at the time he writes "The Family Complexes" (1938). The exact wording of the sentence in which he mentions fetishism, the only occurrence of it in this text, is the following:

Depending on whether the pressure of the sexual instinct is sufficient or not, this identification of the narcissistic phase can be observed either to generate the formal demands of homosexuality or of a sexual fetishism, or, in the system of the paranoiac ego, to become objective as an external or internal persecutory agent (p. 35).

Lacan sees fetishism, at the time of the article, as an effect of something that happens *after* the oral phase and *before* the Oedipus, an identification of the narcissistic phase or mirror stage. As a clinical picture, it develops *before* the other is seen as other. As we will see, the roots of Lacan's thinking about fetishism clearly lay within his developmental framework. Unfortunately, apart from the short quote above, Lacan does not develop this idea any further in 1938.

In the intrusion complex, the introduction of a third factor is of crucial importance. Where in the first stage, the maternal imago is the (proto-)object, with the introduction of the intrusion complex, the first full-fledged object is formed: a rival, a brother, a sibling, a double; that is to say an imago of the other. This object is at first still imaginary, but transforms – by acceptance or sublimation – into an object that can be subject to exchange and contract, and thus symbolic. Lacan speaks about “a third object that substitutes the affective confusion and the spectacular ambiguity by the coherence of a triangular situation” (p. 33). This is the kernel of what Lacan develops years later in Seminar IV (1956): the appearance of an element that changes an imaginary relationship into a symbolic one. In Seminar IV (1956), however, this object will not be the semblable, the brother or the double: it will be the father.

### The Oedipus complex

Lacan’s definition of this complex is quite straightforward. He sees the base of the Oedipus in the sexual drives of the infant:

By attaching the child through sexual desire to the closest object that normally offers him a presence and an interest, namely the parent of the opposite sex, these drives provide the basis of the complex, while their frustration forms its core. Even though this frustration is inherent to the essential prematurity of the drives, the child links it to a third object which the same conditions of presence and interest normally indicate to him as being the obstacle to their satisfaction, namely the parent of the same sex (p. 36).

For the boy, the father appears as both agent of the sexual interdiction and as the example of its transgression. This tension is resolved by repression of the drives and by the sublimation of the paternal imago which will perpetuate a representative ideal in consciousness. They will result in two instances: the instance that represses is the superego, the instance that sublimates the ego-ideal. They represent the achievement of the complex.

What then, is castration? Lacan speaks about a double affective movement of the subject – aggressiveness against the parent with whom his sexual desire puts him in a position of rivalry and then a secondary fear that his aggression will be reciprocated – and a *phantasm* underpinning them (p. 39).

But what is the status of this phantasm? According to Lacan, Freud saw the menace of castration as real (p. 39). Lacan himself interprets this menace merely as a *phantasm* in a series of phantasms that one can trace back in the end to a primitive phantasm: “The phantasy of castration is as a matter of fact preceded by a whole series of phantasies of the fragmentation of the body that go, in regressive order, from dislocation and dismemberment through gelding and disemboweling to devoration and burial” (p. 44). Lacan goes even a step further and claims these phantasms have their final origin in the weaning experience (p. 44).

And why does the subject form these phantasms? For the subject, these phantasms have a value of defense against the anxiety of this vital ripping. The castration phantasm represents the defense that the narcissistic ego, identified to his specular double, opposes to the renewal of the anxiety which at the onset of the Oedipus tends to shake him:

This crisis is caused less by the eruption of genital desire in the subject than by the object it reactualises, namely the mother. The subject responds to the anxiety this object awakens by reproducing the masochistic rejection through which he overcame his primordial loss, but he does this in accordance with the structure he has acquired, that is to say, in an imaginary localisation of the tendency (p. 45).

What if it goes wrong? Lacan differentiates effects on the superego and effects on the ego-ideal. The one result in inhibitions of the creative activity and the other in inversions of the sexual imagination; he calls them “a great number of disorders, many of which appear at the level of elementary somatic functions” (p. 38).

Further in the text, he complains: “a great many psychological consequences follow the social decline of the paternal imago” (p. 55). At the very end of the text, he blames this social decline for being the kernel of the majority of neuroses (p. 56) – a position the later Lacan will entirely abandon.

What is the value of the Oedipal complex for the subject? We find an interesting answer in Miller’s reading of “The Family Complexes” (1938): “[It] is to make us pass from the deadly maternal other, from the semblable as other which is also deadly, to a sublimated other, which rules with that which he might have there in agreement between the subject and his existence” (Miller, 2005, p. 14).

It is in the Oedipus complex that we find the introduction of the father as a fourth element in a triangular situation, introduced as a solution to the tense relationship of the subject with the mother and the semblable as factor of intrusion. But we also find the idea that phantasms function as defense against anxiety – an idea important to the later Lacan, who will link the phantasm tightly to the object *a*. More interesting even is the fact that it is about an evolving series of phantasms, which ultimately deal with the same problem: lack. Here, the parallel with Lacan’s castration as a form of object lack is easy to trace.

Concluding our reading of “The Family Complexes” (1938), we can resume Lacan’s view on subject development at the time as follows:

In the developmental process, a certain lack provokes a crisis in an otherwise stable state. At the origin we find a premature, objectless stage, in which there is no lack. Birth can be seen as a first crisis, and the ensuing ‘malaise’ as a first form of lack. After lactation, a second stable stage, weaning introduces a second crisis, in which lack objectifies into the maternal imago, an imaginary proto-object. The stable stage that follows, the narcissistic phase or the mirror stage, ends with the introduction of a rival,

typified by the brother, which defines the intrusion complex and the formation of the first full-fledged, albeit still imaginary object: the imago of the semblable.

The *brother* is seen as the example of this semblable, and plays the part of a third element that introduces the coherence of a triangular situation. The crisis ending this stage is introduced by the appearance of the father who frustrates the incestuous wishes. One could say the father is the fourth element changing the triangular situation in a quadrangular one.

However, if something goes wrong in the sublimation of these crises, the result can be a plethora of clinical phenomena. One result can be fetishism: Lacan links it here as an effect of something that happens *after* the weaning phase and *before* the Oedipus.

In his theory of object lack, Lacan retains a lot of what he developed in “The Family Complexes” (1938). The central idea of a formative lack evolving through different stages is already clearly present. As Miller puts it: “The liaison imago-complex expresses itself in this: that it is the loss of the object – to name this complex, the moment when the object is lost is chosen” (2005, p. 14).

As said, we find clear links between the weaning complex and the Oedipus complex with frustration and castration, while the link between the intrusion complex and privation is less obvious. However, when we will see that Lacan will continue in Seminar IV (1956) to differentiate a dual, a triangular and a quadrangular period in subject-development, this link will become clearer. The major difference is that the idea of the brother as third element of the triangle will be broadened to any object that will be a rival for the desire of the mother; it is exactly this object that Lacan will call the phallus.

## Concepts for a description of subject-development

It is necessary to turn now, before attempting a detailed analysis of Lacan’s ideas on fetishism, to a static description of the conceptual framework Lacan uses to describe the

dynamics of subject-development and object lack in Seminar IV (1956). A thorough understanding of Lacan's theory of object lack is crucial to provide the framework that contextualizes his early elaboration of fetishism as the paradigmatic perversion.

As said, Lacan articulates the development of the subject dialectically with the three forms of object lack, the three objects that can lack and the three agents of lack. In this articulation, each form of object lack functions as a crisis, as a Hegelian antithesis that disrupts the temporary stability of one of the three orders, which will lead – as a kind of synthesis – to a next developmental stage – just as it did in “The Family Complexes” (1938). It is important, however, to stress that in Seminar IV (1956), Lacan sees all of the stages as only reconstructions after the fact, made up with material out of analysis. As such, they don't have value for a description of the psychic development of the individual as such, but only logically and structurally, within the context of psychoanalysis. Through this elaboration, lack will come to the fore as the central concept, a concept that will later be elaborated by Lacan as the object *a* – which will be crucial to think perversion *beyond* fetishism.

In order to follow Lacan's description of subject-development in Seminar IV (1956), one needs to be familiar with quite some Lacanian concepts. Because his treatment of the subject is non-linear, intricate and complex, and interspersed with clinical analysis and many asides, we try to reconstruct the main line of his argument by describing how the concepts stack up to result in a synthetic table.<sup>67</sup>

AGENT		LACK	OBJECT
Symbolic Father	Symbolic Mother	Frustration Imaginary Dam	Real Breast = Real Phallus
	Imaginary Father	Privation Real Hole	Symbolic Phallus = Symbolic Child
	Real Father	Castration Symbolic Debt	Imaginary Phallus

Figure 1 Synoptic table of object lack

Each of these concepts will be shortly introduced.

### *Three forms of object lack*

The basis Lacan starts from, is the idea that every relationship to an object is characterized by three factors: the way in which the object lacks, the lacking object and the agent who installs the lack. Each of these factors can be imaginary, symbolic or real. Lacan calls real lack *privation*, imaginary lack *frustration* and symbolic lack *castration*. When he introduces the concepts, he defines them very briefly and enigmatically. Their meaning, or better: their use value, will become clear from their many uses in the particularly rich context of Lacan's text. We cite briefly Lacan's definitions.

To explain why he sees privation as a real lack, Lacan refers to Ernest Jones (1927), who introduced the notion of privation. Lacan recalls that Jones had said that frustration and

privation are lived in the same way by the psyche. To differentiate them, and to explain why privation is a *real* lack, Lacan refers back to Freud's notion of the demand of the phallus. The next quote is the nearest Lacan comes to a definition of privation:

It is clear that, in as far as we need to refer to privation, it is in as much as phallicism, being the demand of the phallus, is, as Freud says, the major point of the whole imaginary game in the conflictual progress that is described by the analysis of the subject. It is only concerning the real, as something entirely different from the imaginary, that we can speak of privation. It is not in that (imaginary) way that the demand of the phallus operates. It appears quite problematic that a being presented as a totality, could feel itself deprived of something that, by definition, it does not have. We will say thus that privation, in its nature of lack, is essentially a real lack. It is a hole (p. 36).<sup>68</sup>

Lacan's definition of frustration as an imaginary lack is quite dense. To put it briefly, he sees it as the form that lack takes when it is situated on the level of the Imaginary:

[frustration] is a lesion or an imaginary damage [...] Frustration is essentially the domain of the claim. It concerns something that is desired and that is not obtained, but it is desired without any reference to any possibility of satisfaction or acquisition. Frustration is by itself the domain of exigencies that are unbound and lawless. The centre of the notion of frustration in as much as it is one of the categories of lack, is an imaginary damnation (p. 36).<sup>69</sup>

When the lack situates itself on the symbolic level, Lacan calls it castration. He describes it mainly as a symbolic debt. To define it, Lacan refers to Freud:

Castration has been introduced by Freud in a way that is absolutely coordinated with the notion of the primordial law, of what there is of the fundamental law in the interdiction of incest, and in the structure of the Oedipus [...] Castration can only be classified in the category of a symbolic debt (p. 36).<sup>70</sup>

### *Three phalli*

In order to analyze Lacan's definitions, and before we deal with the question of *which* the objects are that are being lacked in privation, frustration and castration, we take a look at the way Lacan uses the concept phallus. To him, the concept is more complex and



abstract than what Freud understands under the term. Where for Freud, phallus is most of the time simply a synonym for penis, Lacan introduces some clear distinctions: he speaks about the real, the imaginary and the symbolic phalli.

Lacan uses the term real phallus mostly to refer to the real biological organ as it is lived by the subject; that, what Freud calls the penis. The real phallus has an important role to play in the Oedipus complex of the little boy, for it is precisely via this organ that his sexuality makes itself felt in infantile masturbation; this intrusion of the Real is felt like something that provokes anxiety. We find the best description of its importance in Lacan's analysis of the outbreak of Little Hans' phobia. When sexual tension begins to manifest itself for Little Hans, his penis starts to become real: the child starts to masturbate (p. 225). This intrusion of a real object produces a fundamental anxiety, which shakes Little Hans' world at its foundation: the omnipotence of the mother, till then the center around his world was ordered, suddenly is threatened (p. 341).

The imaginary phallus, on the other hand, is to be considered as the form, the upright image of the penis, the penis imagined as a part object which may be detached from the body. As such, the imaginary phallus should not be confused with the penis in reality:

on the imaginary level, there is only one single primitive representation of the state, of the genital stage – the phallus as such [...] The upright image of the phallus is fundamental. There is only one. There is no other choice than either a manly image or the castration (pp. 49-50).<sup>71</sup>

Whereas the castration complex revolves around the imaginary phallus, the question of sexual difference revolves around the symbolic phallus. The symbolic phallus is a signifier, and as such a possible object of exchange, something that one can have or not, that one can be given or not and can lose or not. Unlike the imaginary phallus, the symbolic phallus cannot be negated, for on the symbolic plane an absence is just as much a positive entity as a presence.

But, as Lacan elaborates in “Signification of the phallus” (1966), it is not just a signifier amongst the other signifiers: “the phallus is a signifier [...] destined to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier” (p. 579).

We could illustrate the relationship by saying that the phallus is like the gold standard of the other signifiers. Without it, the other signifiers would not have a common measure; they become incommensurable and unbound.

Lacan sees an important link between this privileged signifier and desire. To clarify this link, we briefly recall Lacan’s definition of desire: “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)” (p. 580).

In a way, the subject, by definition desiring, emancipates out of this phenomenon: “for [...] both the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be subjects of need or objects of love—they must hold the place of the cause of desire” (p. 580).

What, now, is the relation between desire and the phallus? “The phallus is the privileged signifier of this mark in which the role [part] of Logos is wedded to the advent of desire” (p. 581). In other words, “The phallus as a signifier provides the ratio [*raison*] of desire” (p. 581).

To put it very briefly, with a formula that suffices for our purposes, we could say that the symbolic phallus is the signifier of desire.

Later on in Lacan’s teaching, the phallus will become, amongst other – possible lacking – objects, generalized into the concept of the object *a*, which Lacan will come to see as cause of desire. This notion, as we will see in later chapters, is crucial to think perversion structurally.

### *Three objects of lack*

After having described the three forms of object lack and the three phalli, we turn to the question of which the objects are that lack in castration, frustration and privation. Lacan does define them briefly, but volunteers little extra information.

The imaginary phallus is the object of symbolic castration. Why the imaginary phallus? Castration is not about the lack of a real object. In other words, castration is not about really cutting the penis off; it is clearly about the fear of losing an imaginary object, the imaginary phallus, in the sense of the image of the penis, as described above (pp. 36-39).

The real breast or the real phallus are defined as the object(s) of imaginary frustration.

As Lacan put it, "Frustration is [...] however imaginary, always frustration of a real object" (p. 34).<sup>72</sup> In his description of the object of imaginary frustration, however, Lacan is quite ambivalent; he gives not one but two instances of real objects that can lack in frustration. The object frustrating a child, is the (real) breast (p. 62), while the object frustrating woman is different: it is the (imaginary) phallus (p. 190), while in the case of the young homosexual woman that Lacan analyses further in the Seminar, it is a baby (p. 127). We can accept this contradiction when Lacan explains that it is not the *object* of frustration that is central; it is the *love* of which one is frustrated that is crucial. For Lacan, every time there is frustration of love, it is compensated for by satisfaction of the need (p. 174).

The object of real privation is the symbolic phallus or the symbolic child. real privation is always of a symbolic object: "The notion of privation [...] implicates the symbolization of the object in the Real [...] To indicate that something is not there, is to suppose it's possible absence" (p. 218).<sup>73</sup>

To explain this, Lacan uses the concept of place. Place is by excellence a symbolic notion: like a book in a library, that lacks in the library system when it is not at its place, even if it is somewhere else in the library (p. 38). In other words, the absence of something in reality is always symbolic.

But here as well, Lacan is double. The symbolic objects that a subject can be deprived of are the (symbolic) phallus and the (symbolic) child. In assuming the female sex, women are deprived of the symbolic phallus. This equivalence is the reason why a child can function for the woman as a replacement of the symbolic phallus she has been deprived of (pp. 96-98).

A way to deal with Lacan's confusing characterization of the objects of castration, frustration and privation is to see these as part of a strategy to make Freud's concepts more abstract, and thus more useable in a larger context. On the one hand, he breaks Freud's concepts apart in different distinguishable concepts, as we saw above with the concept 'phallus'. Here, on the other hand, he uses some of Freud's concepts, breaking them up into some of their aspects to subsume the result under more generic categories: in that way, the breast and the phallus are both subsumed (in their real aspects) under the concept 'real object' (of imaginary frustration), while the phallus and the child are subsumed (in their symbolic aspects) under the concept 'symbolic object' (of real privation). In different passages, Freud hints at some of his concepts having an equal value (for instance feces = phallus = child), but the difference in the approach of Lacan is that this equal value only goes for the concepts in question under a certain aspect, and that he is able to name these aspects.

The most important notion is Lacan's differentiation of objects according to the way they lack. As we will see, they will be articulated and refined in the context of subject development.

Later in his work, Lacan will strive to give his concepts a logical value, turning them into mathemes – psychoanalytical logical constants – which enable him to perform certain complex operations with them. This use of concepts is out of the scope of this chapter, but keeping in mind that that is where Lacan's work tends to, can make us somewhat understand the way Lacan flexes his concepts already in Seminar IV (1956).

### *Three agents of lack*

As we see in the table, each of the three forms of lack is performed by an agent. Here as well, Lacan discerns real, imaginary and symbolic instances, in case the real father, the symbolic father, the imaginary father and the symbolic mother. It is important to keep in mind that when Lacan speaks of father and mother, he speaks of roles and functions, which not necessarily coincide with the biological father or mother.<sup>74</sup>

Lacan differentiates the actual father from the real, the symbolic and the imaginary father, which can be incarnated by different actual agents. He sees the real father as the real agent. Lacan stays quite enigmatic of what the real father exactly is. He devotes barely one paragraph to this function (p. 220), saying mainly that the real father is something entirely different from the symbolic and imaginary father, and that an infant only has a very difficult apprehension of it. He concludes by begging his listeners to accept that it is to the real father that the function of agent is given in the castration complex, that castration is always linked to the incidence, to the intervention, of the real father (p. 221).

The real father —insofar as he desires the mother and is the object of her desire — is embodied by anything that carries out the child's symbolic castration, that is, both the renunciation and the realization of the child's incestuous desire. The real father is any being that, either in reality or by means of its reality, leads the child to give up being the mother's phallus, on the one hand, and leads the mother to give up trying to make the child into her phallus, on the other.

Lacan sees the imaginary father as the imaginary agent. He describes him (p. 220) as the frightening father we know at the bottom of so much neurotic experiences. The imaginary father is the product of the child's imagination of his libidinal capture by the other in the mirror stage. He finds support in the various cultural representations of the father as completely tyrannical or perfectly good. The child makes the actual father wear the masks and disguises of one or the other of these imaginary fathers.

As we can see in the table, the symbolic agent of imaginary frustration is the symbolic mother. Lacan doesn't say anything specific of the symbolic mother. He just describes her as the agent who 'operates' frustration, but not in her own name. She speaks in the name of an – always absent – instance: The symbolical father, also sometimes characterized as the death father, the original father of Freud's primal horde. As Lacan puts it: "behind the symbolical mother, there is the symbolical father" (p. 219).<sup>75</sup>

In other words, the symbolical mother is the one through which the death father speaks. Through her speech and acts, her presences and absences, she passes on the law of the death father.

The symbolic father is a necessity of the symbolic construction, that we can only situate in a beyond, an irreducible given of the world of the signifier (p. 219-220). To Lacan it is the veridical father, the death father, clearly based on Freud's mythical arch-father from "Totem and Taboo" (1912-1913).

But we find this mythical symbolic father not only behind the symbolic mother, but also behind the two other agents in the table: behind the imaginary father and the real father. In other words: this symbolic father is an all-encompassing instance. The table permits only one reading: The symbolical father is the instance that imposes privation through the imaginary father, castration through the real father and frustration through the symbolical mother.

In other words, it is the instance responsible for installing a separation between mother and child, between sexes and generations.

Let us turn now, equipped with a basic understanding of the static constituents of the conceptual framework, to Lacan's text, and try to tackle two questions. Firstly: What, if any, is the order, whether chronological, structural or other, of privation, frustration and castration? Secondly: How does this conceptual framework allow us to re-think fetishism?

### Ordering privation, frustration and castration

The way Lacan introduces the key terms of his Seminar is remarkable: he introduces the concepts without offering any precise order between them. He simply states that he deals with the concepts in the order of what is most known: first castration, followed by frustration and finally privation (p. 36). When he gives the definitions we cited above, he proceeds differently, in the order of 'what is most familiar', putting frustration first, followed by privation and castration. When he discusses which object lacks in the three categories of object lack (pp. 38-39), the order in which he deals with them is also castration – frustration – privation, but the reason he gives now for starting with castration is laconic: because it would be the *clearest*.

Ordering the three forms of object lack in the development of the subject is in no way straightforward. Jean-Jacques Gorog, in a short text published only on the internet, describes Lacan's approach as very complex: "It results in a vortex-effect that complicates [...] a description we would have wished, for the sake of clarity, to be more linear" (Gorog, 1994, p.1). This complexity is the reason why Gorog concludes to a quite different ordering of the three concepts than for instance Chiesa (2007). While Gorog claims the ordering privation – frustration – castration (1994, p.1), Chiesa argues for frustration – privation – castration (2007, p. 64). Dor (1988) and Evans (1996) even don't propose an order at all, while Schindler (2004) reads the synoptic table of privation, frustration and castration as an unordered "Borromean chain with three triple knots" (p. 118). Because of this complexity, we choose to follow the development of these concepts

very closely in the meandering of Lacan's text, and will discuss the relevant passages in detail. The analysis of the rich conceptual context will enable us to come to a better understanding of subject development and the place of fetishism in it.

### *Only afterwardly – introduction of the phallus*

The first elaboration of the dynamic way in which the three forms of object lack is to be found quite early in the Seminar. Lacan stresses that the object relations can only be understood *after* they are structured by a signifying articulation, that the pre-genital relationship can only be apprehended starting from the Oedipus:

The images and phantasms which form the signifying material of the pre-genital relation come themselves from an experience that is made in contact with the signifier and the signified. The signifier takes its material somewhere in the signified, in a certain lived experience. It is only *nachträglich* that this past is grasped, and that this imaginary organization is structured [...] So, from the origin onwards, the objects from the different periods (oral, anal etc.) are already taken for something else than what they are. These objects already where reworked by the signifier (pp. 53-54).<sup>76</sup>

We note in passing by that Lacan has Melanie Klein here in his crosshairs; according to Lacan, she mixes everything up by placing the Oedipus in the oral stage (p. 159).

In this passage, we see Lacan deal with two kinds of ordering principle: the chronological ordering principle, in which, of course, what is pre-oedipal happens before the Oedipus, and the structural ordering principle, which starts from Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit*, and holds that what happens before the Oedipus is only written down – and thus ordered logically – afterwards.

We remark as well the parallelism between two distinctions: the distinction pre-Oedipal/Oedipal on the one hand, the distinction between 'a certain lived experience' and 'the signifying articulation' on the other. This parallelism can be read as follows: the pre-Oedipal is from the order of the signified, while what is Oedipal is from the order of the signifier.



This passage allows us to see at least part of a chronological ordering appear in Lacan's view on object lack: frustration and privation happen chronologically before the Oedipus, which is, to put it very briefly, synonymous with castration. The question, however, of any chronological ordering between frustration and privation is left open at this point in the text.

Further in the text, while recapitulating the three concepts, Lacan adds a new layer to the concept of privation:

when it is about privation, the lack is in the Real, meaning that it is not in the subject. In order for the subject to access privation, he needs to conceive of the Real as being possibly different from himself, that is to say that he symbolizes it already. The reference to privation as it is advanced here, consists in putting the symbolic before (p. 55).<sup>77</sup>

Here, at first sight, Lacan seems to imply that privation, as it happens after symbolization – and we saw above he equals symbolization with the Oedipus – happens not only *structurally* but also *chronologically* after castration, which is contradictory with what we saw above. We only can make sense of this when we see the symbolization needed for privation as a not yet complete symbolization, as a proto-symbolization.

The above quote about privation leads Lacan to ask how the subject is led to symbolize, i.e. in what way does frustration introduce the symbolic order? (p. 56).

This firstly seems to imply, as privation requires – as said above *at least partial* – symbolization, that Lacan places *frustration* before *privation*, pointing to the ordering of frustration-privation-castration.

Secondly, it leads us to wonder what Lacan's view on the development of the symbolic exactly is, and how it relates to the object lack theory. We will come back to this question later.

At this point in the text, at least, Lacan says that the introduction of the symbolic order cannot be understood solely *within* the relationship mother-child, but that a third element is needed: the phallus. The phallus as third element installs what he calls a triangular

relationship mother-child-phallus, where before was only a dual relationship between child and mother (p. 56; cf. Miller, 1994, p. 46). We clearly remark the parallel with “The Family Complexes” (1938), where the sibling or the double played the role of third element.

To introduce this third element, Lacan starts from the observation that the mother herself is characterized by a lack: the lack of the phallus. This lack of the phallus in the mother – which, for Freud, was crucial to think fetishism – is crucial for the dynamics of the child-mother relationship. As Miller puts it: “Lacan deconstructs the relation of the mother to the child, simply by recalling the fact of the mother’s exigency of the phallus” (1994, p. 46).<sup>78</sup>

But she doesn’t only *lack* the phallus, she also *demand*s from the child that it fills this lack (p. 56). In other words, for the mother, the child is always child *and* phallus. This introduces what Lacan calls an imaginary discordance. The next question is then how – and when – the child becomes aware of this lack in the mother, and how he will relate to it; how the child will be able to see that what his mother desires in him, is her own imaginary phallus:

In some cases, it looks like the child understands this position only after a period of symbolization. But in certain cases, it seems to be in a more direct way that the child deals with the imaginary dam – not his own, but the one in which the mother finds herself in relation to the privation of the phallus (pp. 56-57).<sup>79</sup>

To recapitulate, we can say that when the infant becomes aware of the fact that there is lack in the mother, this lack introduces a third element into the formerly dual relationship between mother and child, which now becomes a triangular relationship: child-mother-phallus. This awareness can come *after symbolization*, in an indirect, mediated fashion or (as he says, ‘in *certain cases*’) *before symbolization*, i.e. in a direct, unmediated, unsymbolized fashion. It is here that Lacan will situate fetishism.

Some points in this dense and complex passage remain, at least at this moment in the text, unclear. Firstly, it is not clear where symbolization is exactly situated chronologically

in the evolution of the child. Secondly, when the child has to deal with the lack of the phallus in the mother, and has to deal with the imaginary dam, it is not with his own, but with his mother's; her imaginary dam in relation to her privation of the phallus (p. 57). This is particularly unclear for two reasons.

The first reason is that privation is dealt with here in relationship with the mother, leaving the question open if there is such a thing as privation of the child, or if Lacan 'replaces' this by the privation of the mother. Recall, from the definition of privation, that Lacan claims that "when it is about privation, the lack is in the Real, that means that it is not in the subject" (p. 55). For the moment, we hold the hypothesis that 'privation' means 'the mothers' privation', and more specifically, 'the mothers' privation of the phallus'.

The second reason is that Lacan speaks of an 'imaginary dam' and puts it on a par with privation, while he defined *frustration* as an imaginary dam, and *privation* as a real hole. We do not see any other solution than to suppose Lacan made a mistake by mentioning the imaginary dam: it certainly is about privation here.

This whole knot in which privation and frustration seem entangled, the question where to situate privation in a chronological ordering of ways of object lack, and the issue of the relationship between the development of the symbolic order and the different kinds of object lack, lead Lacan to the following question about the moment the child becomes aware that the mother lacks something: "Is it here about something imaginary that is reflected in the symbolic? Is it on the contrary a symbolic element that appears in the imaginary?" (p. 57).<sup>80</sup>

We leave the question open for the moment, and suffice with pointing out the entanglement. This entanglement is undoubtedly the consequence of Lacan's desire to capture analytic experience in an all too symmetrical table with all too perfect permutations.<sup>81</sup>

However, we note mainly two things: firstly, that Lacan says that the mentioned question is crucial for understanding phobia, secondly that he says the triad mother, child and

phallus will be used to question fetishism (p. 57). We will come back to this when we deal with the second question we formulated above: How does this conceptual framework allow us to re-think fetishism?

### *The dialectic of frustration*

At the beginning of the fourth chapter of the Seminar on The Object Relations, “The Dialectic of Frustration” (pp. 59-77), Lacan explains once more what the three forms of lack and their respective objects consist in. Revisiting frustration, he provides us with a new hint at a chronological ordering:

The notion of frustration, when it is put on the first row in theory, is linked to the first age of life. It is linked to the investigation of trauma's, fixations, impressions, coming from pre-Oedipal experiences. This does not mean it is external to the Oedipus – it gives the Oedipus in a way its preparatory terrain, its base and foundation (p. 61).<sup>82</sup>

Lacan once more puts here (cf. as well p. 63; p. 66) frustration in a chronological ordering before castration (i.e. before the Oedipus), but – and this is new – he links it to ‘to the first age of life’, which seems to firmly point it out as a first phase, and thus before privation:

Frustration is considered as an ensemble of real impressions; lived by the subject in a period of its development in which his relation to the real object is normally centered around the said ‘primitive’ imago of the mother breast, around which the first fixations will form. These permitted to describe the different instinctual types and from there the relations in the different stages (oral, anal) and sub-stages (phallic, sadistic); they also permitted to show that they all are marked by a certain ambivalence which makes that the position of the subject participates in the position of the other (p. 62).<sup>83</sup>

In this passage, we find additional elements in support of the view that frustration comes before privation. Firstly, Lacan relates frustration to the imago of the mother breast, which is reminiscent of his treatment of the weaning complex in “The Family Complexes” (1938), which clearly characterizes it as a first stage in infant development. Secondly, Lacan links frustration not only with ‘his’ oral stage, but also, unsurprisingly, with Freud's.

This seems to point if not to an equivalence, then at least to a similarity between Freud's oral stage, Lacan's description of the oral stage/weaning complex in "The Family Complexes" (1938) and his description of frustration in "The Object Relations" (1956). It is worthwhile to pursue this parallel, and also to investigate not only the quite obvious links between the Oedipus complex and castration and between the oral stage and frustration, but as well the less obvious one between the anal stage, the intrusion complex and privation.

When Lacan concentrates on the dialectics of frustration, his starting point is the idea that there are two sides to frustration (p. 66), the first of which he calls the real object. Lacan explains that a child can establish an object relation with a real object on the basis of a periodicity, in which can appear certain holes or lacks. But this periodicity – one could imagine the regularity with which a baby is breastfed and with which its hunger reappears – does not appear out of the blue. Lacan explains that this periodicity is regulated by the second side of frustration: by what he calls the *agent*. And in the case of frustration, the agent is the symbolic mother. To develop the notion of the mother as agent – and thus as different from an object – Lacan draws a parallel with Freud's Fort-Da game:

The mother is not the primitive object; she is something else. The mother appears in the first games, in which a six months old child for instance throws away again and again whatever object it has at hand, only to take it back immediately after. The coupling of presence and absence, articulated extremely precociously by the infant, connotes the first constitution of the agent of frustration, originally the mother (p. 66).<sup>84</sup>

A few important points stand out. Firstly, the age of six months is mentioned as the age where the agent of frustration appears. This seems to indicate a period of frustration before six months, where only the real object is present, and not the symbolic agent.

Secondly, the introduction of the notion of agent seems problematic; how to conceive of something – in case, the mother – that is not the primitive object, but something else? For Freud, the object is what the drive uses to satisfy itself. In Freud's view, an agent that is itself not an object would be nonsense. The difference between 'agent' and 'object' never

becomes entirely clear in Lacan's text. However, the concept comes very close to Lacan's concept of the Other – the stress lies on the externality.

Thirdly, for Lacan, the coupling of presence and absence connotes the Symbolic. This seems to claim that the symbolic order – at least in an embryonic form – is already at work during frustration – albeit in a second time, from six months onwards.

Lacan remarks further that the mother introduces a new element of totality, opposed to the chaos of fragmented objects that characterize the former stage: this new element is the couple presence-absence (p.67). This introduction of a new element *within* the stage of frustration seems to constitute some kind of *crisis* which splits frustration in two sub-stages: the stage of the real, fragmented objects, followed by a crisis – the introduction of the couple presence-absence and the stage where the mother becomes the agent of frustration. But, even if he speaks of a dialectic, Lacan seems to have abandoned the idea of rigorously using 'dialectics' in the Hegelian sense of thesis, antithesis and synthesis – as to articulate a development in stages, as he did in "The Family Complexes" (1938). Instead, he speaks of two sides to frustration.

Let us turn to the description of the second time of frustration, in which the mother acts as the symbolic agent: "This presence-absence is, for the subject, articulated in the register of the appeal or the call. The maternal object is actually called when absent – and when it is present, rejected, in the same register as the call, that is to say by a vocalization" (p. 67).<sup>85</sup>

In this scansion of the call, Lacan sees the bed of the symbolic order. But how can this bed of the symbolic give birth to a full-blown dialectic? "What happens when the symbolic agent, the mother, doesn't answer any more to the child's call? She falls. She was inscribed in the symbolic structuration that made her a present-absent object in function of the call, but [when she stops answering] she becomes real" (p. 68).<sup>86</sup>

It is this becoming real of the mother that seems to form a second part of the second time of frustration:

Till there, [the mother] existed in the structure as agent, distinct from the real object which is the object of satisfaction of the child. When she doesn't answer any more, when, in a certain way, she answers only depending on her whims, she leaves the structure, and she becomes real, that is to say she becomes a power (p. 68).<sup>87</sup>

And, while the mother changes position from symbolic agent to real object, the object changes position as well. Lacan sees them change from objects of satisfaction into objects of a gift – a gift from this maternal power (p. 68).

But the question Lacan doesn't answer clearly, is if the real object becomes a symbolic *object* or a symbolic *agent*. From the way he describes the fate of the real-objects-become-symbolic, it seems that they have kept their object status (cf. the term 'objects of gift' above). So we are left, in this second part of the second time of frustration with two objects: a symbolic one, the breast, and a real one, the mother; moreover, we are left also without an agent, which is particularly unclear and confusing.

The 'dialectics' of frustration add another difficulty: if we look at the table playing such a central role in the whole of the fourth Seminar, we don't find where to put what Lacan describes in the dialectics of frustration: in the table, we find that for frustration, the object is real, and the agent symbolic; there is no place in the row reserved for frustration for the mother becoming real and the object becoming symbolic.

One could argue that there is a place for a symbolic object, namely in the row for privation, and that in the same row, there also would be a place for what has become of the mother: she would have become the 'real hole', that is, the way the object lacks in privation. This reading would contradict the idea that it would be about the second time of frustration. It would imply that the phase where the mother becomes real and the object symbolic, would actually be *privation*. At this point in the text, this looks like the only logically consistent reading.

### *Privation as privation of the mother*

Lacan, continuing to unfold his dialectics of frustration, focuses on what happens 'next', on what he calls "the lacks, the deceptions that encroach on the maternal omnipotence" (p. 69). Here, Lacan refers back to the crucial concept of the phallus that he introduced in the object relations in the chapter "The signifier and the Holy Ghost" (pp. 41-59), and explicitly draws the parallel with Freud. While Freud holds that women lack, among their essential objects, the phallus, Lacan extends this to the idea that, whenever women find a satisfaction in the child, it is because she finds something that calms her need for the phallus (p. 70).

It is interesting to see the stress Lacan puts on this introduction of the phallus:

How does the recognition of the third imaginary term [that the phallus is for the mother] come into play? The notion that the mother lacks this phallus, that she herself is desiring, attained in her power, is more decisive than anything for the subject (p. 71).<sup>88</sup>

The link with Freud's uncanny perception of the mother's missing penis, so crucial to fetishism, is clear here: "Privation [...] is especially the fact that woman do not have a penis, that they are deprived of it. This fact, the assumption of this fact, has a constant incidence in the evolution of nearly every case that Freud exposes to us" (p. 218).<sup>89</sup>

Later in Lacan's work, the mother will be seen as the first Other, written as A. The fact that the mother herself is lacking, will become the matrix of the Other as lacking, the incomplete Other, written as  $\bar{A}$ .

We note in passing that the link between the mother missing the phallus and the desiring mother is not to be found in Freud. For Freud, the consequence is merely the realization of the possibility of castration – by the father. It is exactly at this point that Lacan is innovative, as we will see, concerning fetishism: he describes clearly how privation changes dramatically the position of the child in the relationship with the mother. It is this insight as well, that allows Lacan to draw the parallel between the 'privation' of the



mother and the castration by the father. This, as well, is a step further towards abstraction: what for Freud were different, unconnected, clinical facts, become for Lacan evolutions of the same basic lack. Lacan sees maternal castration, which implicates for the child the possibility of being devoured and bitten, as a precursor to paternal castration, a substitute for it (p. 367).

The link with “The Family Complexes” (1938) is, once more, clear: the crisis of weaning reappears, transformed, in castration anxiety. The link with the intrusion complex is less clear. However, a quote from further in the Seminar enables us to draw the parallel:

One of the most common experiences is that firstly [the child] is not alone because there are other children. But our basis hypothesis is that there is another term at play that is radical, constant, and independent [...] from the presence or absence of the other child [...] It is the fact that [...] the mother conserves the penis-envy [...] It is in the relation to the mother that the child experiences the phallus as being the centre of her desire (p. 224).<sup>90</sup>

We can see this step from brother to phallus as another one in the general process of abstraction we can see as sustaining the whole of Lacan’s work. A specific situation (i.e. the desire of the mother going out to another child) on which a whole part of psychoanalytic theory is based, becomes enlarged to a more general situation, i.e. the desire – caused by the lack – of the mother in general.

But how does the child deal with this ‘fundamental deception’, with this imaginary discordance provoked by the absence of the phallus, with this lack in the mother, with privation? There are two ways, which are decisive for the fate of the subject: a direct and an indirect one. The indirect way happens, as Lacan will explain, normally through the Oedipus – that is, through castration. But there is an exception, which Lacan explores here: phobia.

In Lacan’s dissection of an analysis of a phobia in a young girl, which we do not relate in detail here, the conclusion – i.e. the way the girl escapes from phobia – is interesting,

because it introduces the father as a fourth element in the triangle child-mother-phallus: “The father suffices to maintain between the three terms of the relation mother-child-phallus a sufficient distance for the subject not to have to ‘give of himself’ to maintain this distance” (p. 75).<sup>91</sup>

We remark in passing by that this notion of distance – here distance to the phallus – will be crucial for Lacan’s later development of the relation subject-object. The phallus will be generalized further, as we will show, into the object *a*, which the subject will have to keep at bay, at a distance.<sup>92</sup> How the subject keeps up this distance – or fails to do so – will be seen by Lacan as determinant for the subjective structure – neurotic, perverse or psychotic.

In this light, phobia can be seen as an attempt to escape the state of having to ‘give of oneself’ in order to install such a distance, i.e. by the construction of a phobic object. A quote from the analysis of little Hans’ phobia, analyzed in the last part of the Seminar, is illuminating: “Little Hans has to find a suppletion to this father who continues not to want to castrate him” (p. 365).<sup>93</sup>

This suppletion – to the father, and thus, to castration – is, of course, the phobic object, keeping anxiety ‘bound’, and thus at bay.

In the chapter, “The analysis as bundling and its consequences” (pp. 77-94), Lacan develops castration as the evolution of the pre-Oedipal imaginary triad mother-child-phallus into what we could call the symbolic quartet, with the father as the fourth element. In the normal Oedipal situation, by the intermediary of rivalry and identification with the father, the subject acquires a certain phallic power. It is this that introduces the child into the symbolic order (pp. 81-82).

It is a fundamental deception encroaching on the maternal omnipotence that is needed to accept castration. This deception produces itself when the child recognizes that he is not his mother’s unique object and that his mother’s interest is the phallus. On the basis of

this recognition, the child understands secondly that the mother is herself deprived of the phallus (p. 82).

Here, it becomes clear that it is the way the child deals with the fact that the mother misses the phallus that fills the gap between frustration and castration, and thus describes privation. This corroborates the hypothesis given above that what is described as the second time of frustration should indeed be read as privation.

Lacan describes the imaginary triangle of privation, in which the mother is deprived of the phallus – and in which the child has to deal with this privation – as a labyrinth (p. 190). The thread out of this labyrinth is double; there is a direct and an indirect way of ‘solving’ the lack that is proper to privation. First, Lacan describes the common, typical solution as an indirect way: the symbolic solution to the problem. It is here that we find symbolic castration, operated by the father as the real agent on the imaginary phallus:

The child as real being is taken by his mother as symbol of her imaginary appetite for the phallus. The normal way out of this situation is that the child receives symbolically the phallus which it needs. But for him to need the phallus, he first needs to be menaced by the castrating instance, which originally is the paternal instance [...] The father introduces the symbolic relation and thus the possibility to transcend the relation of frustration or lack of the object within the relation of the castration. This symbolical relation is different, because it introduces this lack of the object in a dialectic that gives the lack a dimension of a law, the law of the interdiction of incest in particular (pp. 82-84).<sup>94</sup>

Bruce Fink (1997, pp. 69-70), in his interpretation of fetishism, puts a lot of stress on the father as guarantor of the child’s entry into the Symbolic. We agree with the importance of the paternal function, but we don’t entirely follow Fink when he describes the canceling out and the naming of the maternal lack by the father as the way out of the imaginary triangle. It is first and foremost the mother who has to leave the door open for such a canceling out and such a naming. Fink’s view leads him, in our opinion, to overweigh the notion of a failing father as a causal explanation for fetishism – and for perversion in general.<sup>95</sup>

In the next paragraph, we discuss precisely that castration is not the only way out of the labyrinth; there is also an indirect solution: fetishism.

### *Fetishism as indirect solution*

Lacan describes the other solution as atypical. It is an imaginary solution:

But what happens when, without the symbolic relation, the imaginary relation becomes the rule and the measure [...]? An evolutionary or historical accident can attain the bind of the mother-child relation in relation to the phallic object, which is at the same time that which women lack and that which the infant discovered that lacked to the mother. A certain coherence lacks. To restore this coherence, there are other than symbolic modes. The coherence can be given by imaginary means, which are atypical (p. 84).<sup>96</sup>

These imaginary means – and it is them that Lacan calls fetishism, and, by extension, perversion – include, as Lacan explains later in the text, the taking of a particular position vis-à-vis the phallus:

We can't understand anything from the phenomenology of perversion unless we see the crucial point: [...] It is about the phallus, and to know how the child realizes more or less consciously that his omnipotent mother fundamentally misses something, and it is always the question to know by which way he will give her this object that she misses, and that he misses always himself (p. 193).<sup>97</sup>

This puts the child in an untenable situation, in which, in order to not be devoured by the mother's desire, he has to give her what he doesn't have. How, crucially, does the child go about to give his mother this object? Lacan answers:

For example, the identification of the child with the mother. Starting from an imaginary displacement in relation to his maternal partner, the child makes the phallic choice. He will realize for her the handling of her longing towards the phallic object (p. 84).<sup>98</sup>

This is how Lacan describes the fetishistic perversion, an imaginary solution to the lack of the object. This is where Lacan is innovating in comparison to Freud. It is by identifying with the phallus, by taking himself the position of what the (m)Other<sup>99</sup> lacks that the child

protects itself from the untenable situation. Lacan calls it identification of the child with the mother, but identification of the child with what lacks in the Other would be more precise.

Further in the text, Lacan deals with this identification with the phallus in exhibitionism and transvestism (pp 166-167; pp. 193-195). They are of minor interest to our argument.

Even if Lacan doesn't always draw a clear line between fetishism and other perversions, in this Seminar, fetishism clearly typifies perversion in general. All that Lacan he says about the imaginary solution to object lack, can be used to characterize the perverse structure. Hence, in "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power", Lacan finds "the fundamental fetish in every perversion" (1966, p. 510).

This is the kernel of Lacan's view on perversion at the time of writing of this Seminar, a view he will generalize and abstract further in his work into the notion that in perversion, the subject takes himself the position of lacking object – of the object *a* – to deal with the lack in the Other. This kernel will not change in the course of Lacan's oeuvre. What will change is its degree of generalization. To come to this generalization, Lacan will need to develop the object *a*. As we will see, the road towards this development will lead Lacan to deal with sadism and masochism. Here, in Seminar IV (1956), however, the object that lacks is still the phallus. One could say that it is halfway on the trajectory from concrete (the penis) to abstract (the object *a*).

## Overview of object lack theory

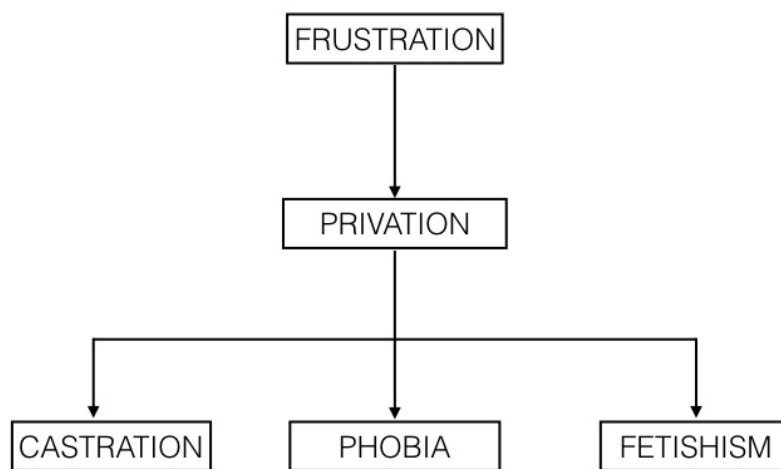


Figure 2 Overview of object lack

To summarize: within the first moment, frustration, there are two times: a first moment in which there is a direct relation with a real object (the breast), and a second moment that can be broken down further. It breaks down into firstly, a moment where the symbolical mother appears as the agent of the absence-presence of the real object, and secondly, a moment where the mother doesn't answer the call anymore, where the symbolic mother evolves into a real object, and the real object becomes symbolic.

As we have seen, there are arguments to read this 'second moment of the second moment' of frustration already as privation, others not to.

What happens in privation – whichever way we read it – is the introduction of lack in the mother. The mother misses the phallus, is marked by lack, and is thus desiring. To deal with the imaginary discordance that privation introduces, there are two main ways, which are decisive for the fate of the subject: a direct (symbolic) and an indirect (imaginary) one. The indirect way passes normally through castration, through the Oedipus with the introduction of the father as stabilizing factor. Exceptionally, the absence of the father as stabilizing element can lead the child to develop a phobic object which serves to keep its anxiety at bay: this is the case of phobia. The direct, imaginary, solution is perversion,

typified by fetishism, in which the child identifies with the phallus in an attempt to regulate the imaginary triangle, to deal with the mother's lack.

In what follows, we will confront our interpretation of Lacan's object lack theory with two secondary sources: interpretations of Lacan's framework of frustration-privation-castration by Gorog (1994) and Chiesa (2007). Then, once we attune our interpretation to these two readings, we will focus more in detail on what we can extract out of the object relation theory for a description of fetishism as type example of perversion as a subject structure.

### Gorog and Chiesa on object lack theory

Different readings of the developmental process involving the three forms of object lack are possible. Lacan himself never gives one singular linear reading. In what follows, we will confront our interpretation of object lack theory with the readings of two authors, which we have chosen amongst many possibly accounts of Lacan's object lack theory in Seminar IV (1956) because they are the only ones to focus in detail on the question of the ordering of the different phases of object lack. In our opinion, an understanding of such an ordering is crucial for Lacan to explain fetishism as a possible vicissitude of subject-development, i.e. as an imaginary way out of privation.

#### *Gorog on object lack*

Gorog (1994), in his reading of Seminar IV (1956), comes up with a different ordering of the three ways of object lack: he puts privation first, followed by frustration and castration. We'll see how and why this is possible.

Gorog looks for the origin of the tripartition Lacan invents to deal with the development of the infant. At the source of this tripartition, Gorog sees, as we did, “The Family Complexes” (1938), where “the development of the infant is described in three phases, already articulated in a non-linear fashion because they implicate every time afterwardsness” (Gorog, 1994, p. 1).<sup>100</sup> Gorog immediately links the three complexes discussed in “The Family Complexes” (1938) to the three ways in which an object can lack. He titles his paragraphs as follows: “1 The weaning complex, which implicates privation – 2 The intrusion complex, which implicates frustration – 3 The Oedipus complex, which implicates castration” (Gorog, 1994, p. 1).<sup>101</sup>

However, he specifies: “it is at the exit of the complex, when the lack [of the object it is about in the complex] is realized, that the mode of lack, privation, frustration, castration, comes into play” (p. 1).<sup>102</sup> This means that every complex sees his knotting effectuated only by the intervention of the next complex. This makes Lacan’s approach very complex: “It results in a whirlpool effect that complicates [...] a description we would have wished, for the sake of clarity, to be more linear. Indeed, in one and the same operation, the times of the development and the structure are joined” (Gorog, 1994, p. 1).<sup>103</sup>

Gorog sees this as the reason why the synoptic table is given as starting from its terminal state; one can only understand the first moment in the light of the third. According to Gorog, in the table, the three modes are thus inversed: castration, frustration, privation, and are as such not given in any chronological order.

Gorog cites one explicit example where Lacan critiques this chronological order: “An explicit indication of this critique of the chronological order is to be found [...] when he stipulates that privation implies a symbolization to which frustration must have introduced the subject “ (Lacan, 1956, p. 56).<sup>104</sup>

But in fact, Gorog takes a shortcut with his reference to Lacan. Lacan writes: “In order to apprehend privation, the subject must first symbolize the Real. How is the subject



brought to symbolize it? How does frustration introduce the symbolic order?" (1956, p. 56).<sup>105</sup>

Gorog is wrong here: Lacan clearly says: to *apprehend* privation. This apprehension happens afterwardly, after the subject symbolizes. In our opinion, it does not follow from this that frustration would be prior to privation, nor that Lacan would provide a chronological ordering of the three ways of object lack.

After these initial precisions, Gorog debates the three different moments.

He explains that Lacan takes the weaning complex as the starting definition of privation: a fundamental privation of the object of satisfaction that the repetition will try vehemently to find back, but that will stay impossible to satisfy. Gorog points out as well that the object of privation has the function of complementing a hole, an abyss in reality, or a lack in the real.

But Gorog also remarks that what Lacan says further in the text about privation, is quite removed from this starting definition. When Lacan speaks about privation as a real hole, he points out the fact that a woman doesn't have a penis, that she is deprived of it. Gorog adds that the whole progress of the integration of man and woman of their proper sex demands the recognition of a privation, which corresponds to penis-envy on one side, to the castration complex on the other.

Apart from following Lacan's major line of argument, Gorog singles out some of the correspondences he sees between privation and the weaning complex, but also shows that Lacan develops privation much further and reviews it retrospectively through his development of the two other moments.

To explain why privation is real, but its object symbolic, Gorog refers to the hallucination of the psychotic subject: that what (according to Lacan) returns in the Real, is the foreclosed signifier; that is the signifier that has never taken up its place in the chain and that lacks in its place. The subject cannot feel deprived of this signifier because he never constituted a trace of it. When the lack of the signifier is real, that which returns in the real

is symbolical. But the absence of this signifier does not suffice to cause psychotic decompensation: there needs to be an appeal to this signifier. Without such an appeal, the response cannot witness to what was never there in the first place. That is why castration installs the signification that was lacking during the initial privation, which now takes into account the sexual difference. This allows us – according to Gorog – to see the identity between the weaning and the penis that lacks to women.

Concerning frustration, Gorog thinks the first moment of it, as described in the table, with the symbolic mother as the agent and the object as real. He discerns a second time of frustration, which caused a problem in our analysis – we took it to be privation – and is not represented in the table.

Gorog calls to mind the description of the reversal: the object which has become object of a gift, makes the mother ‘fall’ from her place as symbolic and makes her become real, as the omnipotent mother who has the power to give or withhold. Gorog describes this as a “passage between frustration and castration”, characterized as follows (Gorog, 1994, p.3): Firstly, as a waiting stage in which the object, once more become symbolic, is not exactly the same as it was in privation. It is not the same in as much as the real mother loses her omnipotence; in that loss of power, it will be the mother who is deprived, not the child. Secondly, he characterizes frustration as a ‘stop’, necessary for the constitution of the clinical phenomena of phobia and the omnipotence of thought.

It is within this moment, according to Gorog, that the subject needs to take the point of view of the mother. What the mother sees, is the child and the phallus. To realize in which position the child finds itself (in case the male or female position), he needs to imagine what the mother sees. The other given as the phallus is imaginary: it is the image of what he himself is not.

Gorog, strengthening his claim that frustration corresponds to the intrusion complex, refers back to Saint Augustine’s jealous sibling. Even when Saint Augustine’s example is absent, it stays the model. The semblable of which the subject is jealous, which determines the jealousy, is the imaginary phallus which installs itself as third between

mother and infant: “In that way, frustration, to be completed, supposes the introduction of the imaginary third” (Gorog, 1994, p. 4).<sup>106</sup>

In castration, the object is imaginary: it is about the mother’s image of the phallus. Gorog points out that Lacan shows that the castration threat doesn’t have any effect on little Hans as long as the phallic object is not distinct from his person, as long as his mother is not understood as being deprived of this organ.

Castration, Gorog explains, consists in a symbolic cut, which implicates that the subject takes position as sexuated being. This is only possible on the condition of a return to privation, in which it is this time not the subject that is deprived of the breast, but the mother who is deprived of the phallus.

Our main critique on Gorog’s reading is the fact that it messes up the ordering of privation, frustration and castration, and thus doesn’t do justice to Lacan’s view on subject-development.

At the same time, Gorog’s reading does justice to a trait of Lacan’s text that we had to ‘force’ in our analysis, i.e. the part on the second time of frustration which we read as privation. It enables to see that there is something akin to privation going on at the very first stages of the life of the infant: the appearance of hunger is easier read as a ‘real hole’ than as an ‘imaginary dam’. On the other hand, Gorog ‘forces’ his own analysis as well when he uses Lacan’s own ‘critique’ on the chronological ordering to put privation first by citing Lacan imprecisely.

A strong point in Gorog’s interpretation is the equalization of the sibling and the phallus as the third, mediating objects.

Another upside of such a different reading where privation, frustration and castration are ordered differently, is the fact that it shows the complexity of Lacan’s text, and the fact that there is no such thing as ‘the’ interpretation which can do justice to the whole of the text.

On the other hand, we note that the basis of the logical structure to be found in child development stays the same in both Gorog and our readings: first the subject is in a dual relationship (with the mother), secondly he finds himself in a triangular one (with the phallus as third element) and finally in a quadrangular one (with the father as fourth angle of the square). It is this basic structure that provides the basis on which to build a more granular view of fetishism – and of perversion at large.

### *Chiesa on objet-lack*

Lorenzo Chiesa, in “Subjectivity and Otherness” (2007), develops yet another interpretation, which is closer to ours than Gorog’s. He sees the three moments as sequential – in a logical fashion – *and* as each introduced by a crisis: “The child is introduced to the three logically sequential ‘stages’ of the Oedipus complex through three different ‘crises’” (p. 64).

Chiesa differs with Gorog – and concurs with our interpretation – mainly on two points. Firstly, when Chiesa names the stages, he clearly gives them in a chronological order: frustration introduces the child into the first stage, privation to the second stage and castration to the third stage. Secondly, privation is seen as the realization of the child of the privation of the *mother*: “The child then accedes the second stage as soon as he realizes that the mother is ‘deprived’, that she lacks (in the Real) the (symbolic) phallus” (p. 64).

What now are Chiesa’s arguments to come to this reading?

First, we will look at his arguments to see privation as ulterior to frustration. The table mentions the imaginary father as the agent of privation and the symbolic phallus as object lacking in this moment. Chiesa makes sense of this by seeing privation as applying exclusively to woman (p. 75). Nonetheless, Chiesa speaks also about privation of the *child*: “The child is able fully to assume privation, and therefore sexuation *tout court*, only when the [Oedipus] complex is finally resolved” (p.76). We suppose Chiesa interprets

privation *of the child* here as we do: as a stage where the child comes to understand that the mother is deprived of the phallus: "The second stage of the Oedipus complex [i.e. the stage Chiesa sees as starting with privation] is two-faced: by depriving the mother of the child *qua* phallus, the (imaginary) father also simultaneously dispels the child's mistaken belief that he is the only object of his mother's desire" (p. 76). The first stage of the Oedipus coincides as such with frustration.

Secondly, Chiesa gives two accounts of privation, according to him complementary. The first account emphasizes the 'natural' role of the phallic *Gestalt* in the child's initial assumption of sexual difference: the child realizes that the mother is deprived as a result of the fact that he is himself captivated by something else than the mother, i.e. by the phallic *Gestalt*. The second account underlines how this same realization can only effectively be put into practice insofar as the mother is already characterized as a deprived being by a pre-existing symbolic Law.

We could attempt to link these two accounts of privation by supposing that, for Lacan, the moment in which the child is captivated by the phallic *Gestalt* (first account) coincides with the moment in which he directly identifies with the phallus *qua* forbidden object of his mother's desire (second account) (cf. p. 77).

As one can see, Chiesa's interpretation corroborates our own, while adding some subtleties and addressing the problem of *who* it is that is deprived. According to him, the mother is deprived, and the privation of the child happens once he understands that his mother is deprived. In our opinion, Chiesa's reading doesn't account for the way the mother reacts to her own deprivation: by desiring the phallus – in the father, but, also, in the child. It is this desire, the mother's desire, the index of the mother's lack, that the child will try to fill – either by symbolic means, through the Oedipus, or by imaginary means, through fetishism.

## Fetishism in the context of and beyond object lack theory

Now that we have analyzed the context and the conceptual apparatus of the object lack theory, we are properly equipped to distill a number of characteristics of the fetishistic subject structure. While these characteristics don't paint the whole picture of fetishism, they will, in a second time, be completed by our analysis of Lacan's take on fetishism in the part of Seminar IV (1956) where he moves beyond object lack theory. Together, they provide a list of characteristics that allows for a synoptic description of the fetishistic subject structure.

### Fetishism in the context of object lack theory

To start with, we are justified to claim now that, in the context of object lack, just like castration and phobia, fetishism is an attempt at protection against anxiety, which can be read as a protection against the intrusion of the Real: "The fetish finds itself fulfilling [...] a function of protection against anxiety [...] here as well, the object has a certain function of complementation in relation with something that presents itself as a hole, a hole in reality" (Lacan, 1956, p. 23).<sup>107</sup>

We reformulate this as a first characteristic of fetishism: Fetishism is a specific form of protection against anxiety, against the intrusion of the Real.

When we reread the crucial passage on the symbolic solution to the lacking female phallus (pp. 82-84, cited above), and negate all the positive assertions it includes, we come up with two interesting characteristics. When the situation is not solved in the normal – indirect – way, thus in fetishism, the following theses hold: The child *does not* receive the phallus symbolically, the child *has not* been menaced by a castrating instance and the lack of the object is *not* introduced in a dialectic that gives it a dimension of law.

We reformulate these points into two more characteristics of the fetishistic subject structure:

Because the subject of fetishism has not been menaced by a castrating instance, he has not received the phallus symbolically; rather than to have the phallus, he aspires to be it.

The lack of the object is not introduced in a dialectic that gives it a dimension of law; for the subject in fetishism, the law is elastic; instead of being the heir of the paternal law, he will try to take the position of founder of his own law – or, as we will see, of herald of a law which comes from elsewhere. Without the menace of a castrating instance, there is no possibility to traverse the Oedipus: “The end of the Oedipus complex is correlative with the installation in the unconscious of the law as repressed, but permanent” (p. 211).<sup>108</sup> This is what Lacan calls the superego. In other words, when privation is not followed by castration, a proper superego will not develop.

This gives us the following characteristic: The subject in fetishism will not traverse the Oedipus and not be heir to the paternal law.

In order to maintain himself in the uncastrated ‘outlaw’ position, the subject in fetishism has to delude:

[in privation] the child finds himself in the position where he tries to lure his mother [...] This lure is very manifest [...] for example in the attempts of the child to seduce the mother [...]. What is it actually about in the Oedipus? About the fact that the subject is himself deluded by this lure in such a way that he finds himself engaged in the existing order, which is of a different dimension than the psychologic lure by which he entered it (p. 201).<sup>109</sup>

In fact, in certain seduction scenes, the child tries to provide the mother with the phallus she lacks. In order to achieve this (re-)completion of the deprived (m)Other, he needs to invest his own, clearly inadequate, little organ. It is, in a way, exactly this inadequacy that

makes the pervert perverse: when a possibly castrating instance – whether represented by the mother or not – lacks, the child will have to invest himself fully – i.e. he will have to ‘give of himself’ – in order to keep up the illusion that the delusion, the lure, functions:

The subject in fetishism has to delude; he doesn’t accept he lacks the object – or that the mother lacks it. Or, as Lacan formulates it as well:

castration [...] is necessary to assume the maternal phallus as a symbolic object. It is only starting from this fact that, in the essential Oedipal experience, he is deprived of the object by the one who has it [...] that the child can conceive that this same symbolic object shall one day be given to him (p. 209).<sup>110</sup>

So, without castration, the subject in fetishism – and, by extension, the pervert – will not be able to assume the maternal phallus as a symbolic object, and will not be able to assume being deprived of the phallus by the father. In order to deal with the anxiety that the absence of the maternal phallus provokes, he will deny this absence, by, as one could say, trying to ‘give it back’ by imaginary means. As cited above: “it is always the question to know by which way he will give her this object that she misses, and that he misses always himself” (p. 193).<sup>111</sup>

The energy the subject in fetishism puts in the denial of the lack, betrays the fact that this lack is still operational in him. In other words, the Oedipus complex has him in its grip, even if he does not traverse it and imagines to escape castration entirely. It is this that differentiates perversion from psychosis: in psychosis, lack is foreclosed, while in perversion, it is merely disavowed.<sup>112</sup>

We rephrase this as follows:

The subject in fetishism does not assume the maternal phallus as a symbolic object; instead, he tries ‘to give back’ the (m)Other’s missing phallus by imaginary means. Notwithstanding his denial of lack, lack is still operational in him.



## Fetishism beyond the context of object lack theory

Object lack theory is only partially suited to think fetishism. It doesn't do justice to two of Freud's most important ideas concerning the perversion. Firstly, the idea of a construction of the screen memory by the subject in fetishism is missing. Secondly, Freud's intuition of the fetish having a sign-character, is not taken into account. In the continuation of Seminar IV (1956), Lacan, elaborates some new concepts to broaden his vision on fetishism and to address these two issues. The position of the fetish between the imaginary and the symbolic is examined with the introduction of the concepts of the beyond and the veil. As we will show, these concepts have a direct link with Freud's concept of screen memory and with his description of the perverse phantasm.

### *The fetish between imaginary and symbolic*

Lacan's development of the concepts of the beyond, the veil and his reworking of the Freudian concept of screen memory, seem to be an attempt to answer his earlier quoted question about the moment the child becomes aware that the mother lacks something: "Is it here about something imaginary that is reflected in the symbolic? Is it on the contrary a symbolic element that appears in the imaginary?" (p. 57).<sup>113</sup>

A partial answer would be that it is not about an image (as exemplifying the Imaginary), nor about a signifier (exemplifying the Symbolic) but about a sign, which is somewhere on the border between both orders.<sup>114</sup>

What is important in our context, is the fact that the sign is something that is fixed, that is determined by a one-on-one relation between the sign and its perceiver, and the signifier something that is articulated, that has only value in opposition to other signifiers (cf. Lacan, 1955, p.167).

In what follows, we analyze the aforementioned concepts with this idea of the sign between the symbolic and the imaginary in mind.

### *The beyond*

In the course of Seminar IV (1956), two ideas on fetishism which are linked to the concept of the 'beyond', are introduced in separate places. The first idea comes from clinical observation. It is the idea that perverse acts present themselves as a paroxysm, that whenever they appear, they constitute a rupture in the subject's life. The second idea, Lacan implicitly borrows from Freud. It is what one could call an oscillation, a divided attitude, that is based on disavowal and the splitting of the ego, and aims at a certain stabilizing beyond.

Lacan introduces the first idea by calling perversion a way of "Realizing a mode of access to the beyond of the image of the other" (1956, p. 85).<sup>115</sup>

Lacan compares this notion of the beyond to what Freud calls Eros, "the union between two individuals, in which everyone is 'ripped of himself', and for a more or less fragile and transitory, even virtual, instant, finds himself as a constituent part of this unity" (p. 85).<sup>116</sup>

Lacan stays vague here, but we can easily read this as a description of a finding back of the lacking object (p. 85).

This access is, of course, not symbolic, and as such extra-historical. Whenever this access to the beyond is realized, it presents itself as a paroxysm. In other words, the perverse solution is always momentary. That is the reason why perverse acts appear like syncopated moments within the history of the subject. According to Lacan, in every perversion, one can observe a convergence or a flooding towards the moment that can be qualified as a passage to the act. In it, we find something like a fusion, a trans-individual dimension that is an access to this beyond (p. 85). It is specific for perversion that such moments of unity are not symbolically ordered, and as such cannot find their place in the history of the subject. In the passage à l'acte, the signifier that could order

the events symbolically, the phallus, lacks. This is why in perversion, the finding back of the object is never realized symbolically, but only imaginarily, phantasmatally.

As we know, Lacan will later develop this object-to-be-found-back as the object *a*, while the need to find this object back will crystalize into desire. While initially (up to Seminar VIII (1960), the object *a* will be 'beyond' desire, from Seminar X (1962) onwards, Lacan will see the object *a* as cause of desire and hence as 'before' (French has the elegant term 'en-deça') desire. In Seminar X (1962), Lacan stresses that the notion of the fetish is ideally suited to illustrate the object *a* as the object-cause-of-desire:<sup>117</sup>

I am going to use the fetish as such, because this is where the veil is drawn back on the dimension of the object as cause of desire. What is desired? It is not the little item of footwear, nor the breast, nor anything else with which you can embody the fetish. The fetish causes desire (1962, p. 103).

As such we can claim that the object of privation, the potential fetish, is the clay from which Lacan will mold the object *a*.<sup>118</sup> Remember that Lacan characterized privation as a real lack, as a hole (p. 36). It is as a lack, as a hole, as real that the object *a* causes desire, and it is in fetishism that this is most apparent.

This gives us the following characteristic: subjects in fetishism tend towards 'passages à l'acte', which appear as momentary paroxysms, in which the lost object is imaginary found back, but which cannot be symbolically ordered in the history of the subject, because the phallus as a binding signifier lacks.

Secondly, in perversion, we find also what Lacan calls an oscillating movement, which we can read as an elaboration of the divided attitude or the splitting of the ego of perverse subjects that Freud speaks about. It is, as Lacan showed with the mirror stage, a property of imaginary relations is to be dual and reciprocal. As said, in subjects in fetishism, we find from time to time that they identify with the mother, from time to time with the object (i.e. the phallus). Lacan sees a typical oscillation between both these positions:

The fact that for a moment the fascinating illumination of the maternal object satisfies the subject, doesn't suffice to establish a general erotic equilibrium. And effectively, when he identifies with the object for a moment, he'll lose his primitive object, the mother, and will consider himself as a destroying object for her. This perpetual game, this profound diplopia marks the whole of the fetishistic manifestation (p. 86).<sup>119</sup>

To illustrate this double sight, Lacan refers to Phyllis Greenacre, who describes an analysis of a perverse subject: "It seems we're in presence of a subject which seems to show his own image in quick succession in two opposed mirrors" (p. 86).<sup>120</sup> Lacan interprets this as the subject moving in a specular relation from the mother to the phallus, where he is alternatively in the one and in the other position. This oscillation only stops, only stabilizes "when this unique, privileged and at the same time impermanent symbol is grasped that is the precise object of the fetishist, notably that something which symbolizes the phallus" (p. 86).<sup>121</sup>

This gives us the following characteristic: In order to attempt to deal with the untenable imaginary triangle, the subject in fetishism incessantly alternates between two positions: identification with the mother and identification with the phallic object. It is the fetish, symbolizing the phallus, that comes to stabilize this situation.

The idea of a moment of stabilization is, as well, crucially important: we can read it as a joint between Freud's and Lacan's visions, i.e. the idea that the fetishistic object symbolizes (or, more precisely, is a sign of) the phallus, but at the same time has an impermanent character. This idea will be developed by Lacan when he deals with the perverse phantasm.

### *The perverse phantasm*

To deepen his understanding of perverse phantasms – which he equalizes here with fetishistic phantasms, Lacan comments Freud's text on the common masochistic

phantasm “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e). We will follow this commentary more in detail when dealing with Freud and Lacan on masochism and sadism. For the time being, we will elucidate a few key points that allow us to distill one more characteristic of the subject in fetishism, i.e. the fact that his phantasm has a sign-character and situates itself as such between the image and the symbol, between the imaginary and the symbolic.

In the punishment phantasms, Freud underlines the difference between the masturbatory activity, which is easily told in analysis, and the formulation of the details of the phantasm, which only happens with much difficulty. This shows there is a gap between the imaginary use of the phantasmal images and their spoken formulation on the symbolic level; to use a phantasm is not the same as to speak about it.

The perverse phantasm in general has two characteristics. Firstly, while the phantasm in neurosis is unconscious, the perverse phantasm is not; it presents itself as a series of enigmatic signifiers which are conscious remnants of unconscious speech. Secondly, the perverse phantasm is the residue of a process which desubjectivates and petrifies the scene from which the phantasm takes its origin – the use of the impersonal, subjectless, passive form in the formulation of the phantasm “A Child *is Being Beaten*” bears witness to this. The phantasm is an enigmatic rest which the subject is unable to develop, a pure sign, taking on the charge of what is on the level of the Other, but is not integrated by the subject: “On the level of the perverse phantasm, all the elements are there, but all that is signification is lost, notably the intersubjective relation. What we could call the signifiers in their pure state maintain themselves in the intersubjective relation, emptied of their subject” (Lacan, 1956, p. 119).<sup>122</sup>

When we apply this symbolic, desubjectivated view of the perverse phantasm to the fetish, we can see the fetish as the enigmatic, because non-articulated, sign of the beyond. It is a condensate of the situation where the child in his sexual curiosity wants to see the mother’s phallus; it symbolizes the phallus of the deprived mother, in which the phallus itself stands for the wish of completing the lack of the mother in an imaginary fashion. It is, as such, desubjectivated. Because it is momentary and paroxysmal, it is not

integrated into the subject's history: it stays an enigmatic rest, a pure sign, which we can see as positioned between the imaginary and the symbolic.

The same can be said for the case Freud discussed in "Fetishism" (1927e); the fetish is here a shine on the nose (ein Glanz auf die Nase) which, more than just standing for the absent female phallus, stands for the *perception* of it. It is frozen into a pure sign between the imaginary and the symbolic.<sup>123</sup>

In other words, the fetish is not articulated, but it symbolizes anyway the phallus. As symbolic condensate, as a sign, it is linked to imaginary elements that find their root in the situation where the child perceives his mother as a-phallic.

This brings us to the following characteristic:

The fetishistic phantasm has a sign-character that situates it between the imaginary and the symbolic.

### *Screen memory*

The fact that the observation on basis of which the fetishistic phantasm is formed, stops before the uncanny discovery of the lack of the mother's phallus, leads Lacan to introduce a link to another concept we retained from our reading of Freud: the screen memory. There is also a clear link with the idea of the beyond: what is beyond, is beyond the screen.

The structure of the fetish and the structure of the perverse phantasm (which Lacan puts here on a par) are similar to the structure of the screen memory, which we could call the moment when the chain of the memory stops: "It stops at the edge of the dress, not higher than the ankle, there where we meet the shoe [...] This shoe can take the function of that which is not seen, but which is articulated, formulated as that which the mother in

fact possesses, the phallus, imaginary undoubtedly, but essential to the symbolic foundation of the mother as phallic" (p. 119).<sup>124</sup>

The instantaneous character of the screen memory is typical of the reduction of the full scene, which is signifying, articulated from subject to subject. The full scene is reduced to that which is immobilized in the phantasm, but stays loaded with all the erotic values included. The fetish is like the witness and the last support of these erotic values.

We remark here the use of another one of Freud's ideas: the idea of a displacement of value. The valorization of the image is formed out of the reduction of the full scene, and this imaginary dimension is the bed of the perversion. As we saw above, the fetish contains also unconscious speech. We can conclude out of this that Lacan sees the fetish as a sign, which situates itself somewhere between the image and the symbol of the point of repression of the uncanny perception of the mother's missing phallus.

This brings us to the formulation of the following characteristic, entirely in accordance with Freud's theory on fetishism:

The fetishistic phantasm is the sign of the point of repression of the uncanny perception of the mother's missing phallus.

### *The veil*

To think the fetish as what is at this side of the beyond, Lacan introduces another concept: that of the veil, which he illustrates with a simple schema (p. 156):<sup>125</sup>

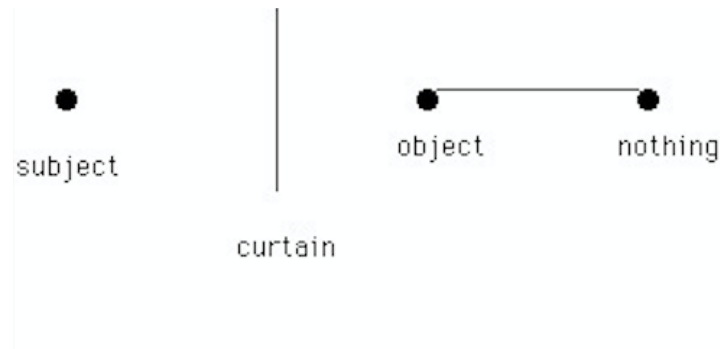


Figure 3 Schema of the veil

The subject is pictured at this side of the veil, the object at the other. Beyond the object, there is nothing; that, what Lacan calls here the beyond, the beyond of the object, the lack, but also the symbol and the phallus as lacking to women (pp. 155-156). The presence of the veil makes the object appear in the place of the lack. This is what happens in fetishism: the veil makes the fetish appear in the place of what lacks in the m(Other).

For Lacan, that which constitutes the fetish, the sign or symbol that fixes the fetish, is borrowed from a screen memory. This screen memory is not simply an instantaneous image; it is as well an interruption of history. As such, it indicates – and veils – the continuation of the movement beyond the veil (p. 157).

In every symbolic exchange, Lacan claims, a beyond of the object is implied. Here, in Seminar IV (1956), this beyond is still represented by the phallus. But it is not any more the phallus in Freud's sense. As Safouan puts it: "There where the phallus keeps, for Freud, a certain positivity, it becomes, for Lacan, lack itself" (2001, p. 68).<sup>126</sup> It is this lack itself that Lacan later will elaborate as the object *a*. The notion of a beyond of the object as lack itself, allows us to see fetishism, which has taken an exemplary role for all perversions, in a new light.

Let us articulate this with an interesting quote about omnipotence:



The structure of omnipotence is not [...] in the subject, but in the mother, in the primitive Other. It is the Other who is omnipotent. But behind this omnipotence, there is this final lack to which the power is suspended. When the subject perceives this lack in the object of which he expects omnipotence, this lack which makes himself impotent, the last resort of the omnipotence is reported to the beyond (p. 169).<sup>127</sup>

Here, the lack in the mother is clearly equalized with the lack in the Other. Here, in other words, the Other appears as incomplete. Moreover, the lack of the Other is equalized with the lack of the subject. But the subject finds, notwithstanding this shared lack, a support to keep up his imaginary omnipotence: the beyond.

This is the neurotic scenario. For the subject in fetishism, it is not the beyond that sustains his imaginary completeness: it is the fetishistic object that comes to cover over lack.

The idea of an incomplete Other and a shared lack, that Lacan will develop later on, will be crucial for his theories about sadism and masochism.

Here, Lacan articulates this lack, this beyond, with the phallus. According to Lacan, in “Fetishism” (1927e), Freud claims that the fetish is the symbol of the penis as the woman doesn’t have it (p. 151). Out of this, Lacan concludes that in fetishism, it is not about the real phallus, in as much as it exists or not, but about the symbolic phallus. The symbolic phallus presents itself as absent in symbolic exchange, as absence functioning as such. What is exchanged in symbolic exchange is always both present and absent. Having appeared at one point, it disappears, to reappear at another point. It circulates, leaving behind the sign of its absence at the point where it came from.

On the one hand, when properly assumed – i.e. for the neurotic – the symbolic object establishes a cycle of imaginary menaces that limit – and organize – the direction and use of the real phallus. That is the sense of the castration complex: the symbolic phallus as a central element is characterized by the fact that it is precisely not an object, but a signifier. But in fetishism, this symbol is petrified into a sign, that bears witness to a lack that is beyond, but is impossible to articulate.

On the other hand, a fortiori, the symbolic phallus institutes the difference between the sexes. In a first phase, it is a question of being the phallus or not, in a second phase the question is to have the phallus or not. While the subject in fetishism stays stuck in the first phase, in which he identifies with the phallus – as that what the (m)Other lacks –, the neurotic accepts not to be the phallus. In a second phase, the neurotic has to deal with the fact that he is marked with the signifier of sexual difference, the symbolic phallus; boys as having it, girls as not having it. The subject in fetishism subject never reaches this second stage:

For the subject in fetishism, the difference between the sexes is not properly integrated.

### *Fetishism as metonymy*

Through an analysis of two of Freud's cases, Lacan articulates the link between the fetish and language; he analyses the metonymic character of fetish-formation. In Seminar V (1957), Lacan comes up with generic formulae for metonymy and metaphor in general. We will apply the generic formula of metonymy to fetishism.

In Seminar IV (1956), Lacan comments extensively on Dora (1905e), Freud's type example of hysteria – which could be read as the 'negative of perversion' – and "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920a), as a case of (the positive) perversion.

In brief, Lacan sees two symmetrical oppositions between the two cases he discusses.

Firstly, Lacan sees the young homosexual woman as the negative of Dora: "the confusion of the symbolic position with the imaginary position happens in both in the opposite way [...] the one is organized in relation to the other like a positive to a negative [...] there is no better illustration of Freud's formula, that perversion is the negative of the neurosis" (p. 136).<sup>128</sup>

Secondly, Lacan claims that Dora's symptoms can be understood as a metaphor, the young homosexual's as a metonymy (pp. 144-147).

In order to contextualize Lacan's use of the terms metonymy and metaphor as used in his analyses of Dora and the homosexual girl, we'll rephrase an important passage from Seminar V (1956), where Lacan introduces the formulae for the metonymy and the metaphor (p. 7). Its generic formula is the following:

$$F (S.....S') S = S (-) s$$

---

Figure 4 Formula of the metonymy

Following Lacan's instructions (pp. 7-8), this formula can be read as follows. The metonymic function (F) of the signifier (S) is the connection of a signifier with another signifier (S'). It permits (=) the elision (of S') by which the signifier (S) installs the lack of being in the object relation; using the value of the 'sending back' (S' sends back to S) to invest it (S) with the desire (the (-) s). The (-) means here the maintenance of the bar. The signifier doesn't enter in the signified.

$$F (S'/S) S = S (+) s$$

---

Figure 5 Formula of the metaphor

We should read this as follows. The metaphoric function (F) of the signifier (S) is the substitution of one signifier (S') for another (S). It produces (=) an effect of signification, of creation (the (+) s). The (+) means here the transgression of the bar. The signifier passes in the signified.

Keeping these formulae in mind, we'll try to articulate how Lacan can hold that neurosis is metaphorical and perversion metonymical, and how he sees that exemplified in Freud's two cases.

To begin with, we note that there is a strong parallelism for Lacan between metonymy and the imaginary on the one hand, and between metaphor and the symbolic on the other.

In Dora, Freud relates the case of a young girl who presents neurotic symptoms after being seduced by Mr. K., the husband of her father's mistress. When Mr. K. tells her that his wife means nothing to him, Dora collapses. Lacan stresses that Dora's neurosis can be understood as metaphorical. It is when Dora fails to put her seducer, Mr. K., in the position of fourth, stabilizing element, that her neurosis breaks out. Lacan shows that the function of Mr. K. was metaphoric – symbolic – for Dora. By extension, Lacan sees the function of the father as metaphoric and as underpinning the traversal of the Oedipus complex.

In the case of the young homosexual woman, the young girl has a relationship with a certain Dame. When her father confronts her and the Dame breaks off the relationship, the young girl jumps of a bridge.

For the young homosexual woman, there is a message of the father: "You'll have a child of me", that plays in her unconscious. In her exalted love for the Dame, she shows her father what real love is, the love that her father refused her. She shows her father how to love for what one hasn't got, for one's lack, for the beyond of the object, for this symbolic phallus she knows she won't find in the Dame, because she knows very well that it is her father who has it (cf. p. 145).

Up to this point, we are in a neurotic scenario. But that changes with the suicide attempt of the young woman, which Lacan describes as a perverse paroxysm, as a passage à l'acte, in which the homosexual girl acts the definitive loss of the object: the phallus that has been definitively denied to her, falls ('kommt nieder' in German). This falling is also an imaginary way to give herself the baby she wished from her father ('kommt nieder' also means 'gives birth' in German) and, at the same time, to destroy herself in a last significant act.

Both interpretations are based on the word 'niederkommt'. This word stands metonymically for the ultimate term, the term of violent death, in which is expressed what it is about for the woman, and which is the only and unique resort for the whole of her perversion, being a stable and particularly reinforced love for the father. So, here we find the heart of the case of the young homosexual: a failing attempt to introduce a fourth, stabilizing element in an imaginary way in an untenable triangular situation.

In other words, perversion is also a way of speaking about something else. It speaks about something else in an imaginary way, as a screen memory. The screen memory is a stop in the (symbolic) chain, and as such a metonymy, because history itself continues. The next part is missing, veiled, and it is in this that the repression consists. That is why Lacan calls the function of the perversion of the subject a metonymic function. To put it otherwise: "in the perversion we find a signifying behavior indicating a signifier that is further in the signifying chain in that it is linked to it by a necessary signifier" (p. 145).<sup>129</sup> In the fetishistic case, this is, of course, the fetish; in other perversions, it can be different; here it is the 'nieder-kommen', in all its overdetermination.<sup>130</sup>

In "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1966), Lacan describes the same thing in the context of a discussion of desire and of the signifier: "desire [...] is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the desire for something else. Hence its "perverse" fixation at the very point of suspension of the signifying chain at which the screen memory is immobilized and the fascinating image of the fetish becomes frozen" (1966, p. 431).

For Dora, things are different: "Dora, taken as a subject, puts herself at every step under a certain number of signifiers in the chain. She finds in the situation a certain perpetual metaphor" (p. 145).<sup>131</sup> For Dora, Mr. K. is her metaphor. Dora knows love exists. She finds a historization of love in which she finds her place in the form of a question: "What does it mean to be a woman?" She expresses herself, she expresses this question

through her symptoms. These symptoms are signifying elements to her. In other words: it is as metaphorical that Dora's neurosis can be understood.

### *A formula for fetishism*

Having both the generic formula for metonymy and an example of perversion as metonymic process, we can devise a particular metonymic formula for fetishism. Filling in the fetish for the first signifier (S) and the missing phallus of the mother for the second signifier (S') makes it possible to re-read the generic formula for the metonymy as follows:

The metonymic function (F) of the fetish (S) is the connection of the missing phallus of the mother (S') with a second signifier (S). It permits (=) the disavowal of the mother's lack of the phallus. By this disavowal, the fetish (S) installs the lack of being in the object relation. By referring to the missing phallus, the fetish is invested with the desire for it ((-s) in the formula). This also means that the fetish doesn't enter into the signified: it stays a petrified sign.

In "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1966), Lacan formulates this lack of being in fetishism in an elegant way. He describes the mother's missing phallus as "that eminent want-to-be" (p. 434).

As shown above, Lacan also compares the fetish to a screen memory. To protect the subject from castration anxiety, the uncanny perception of the mother's missing phallus is frozen and desubjectivated into a point. The screen memory is a stop in the chain of memories, while the chain of history itself continues. In the screen memory, the next part of the chain is missing. The screen memory veils the full scene, but at the same time inherits its value. This metonymic displacement of value onto an image is the cradle of fetishism. But the fetish is more than an image: it is also a signifier, which stays the witness of something beyond the veil. And here lies the importance of Lacan's

interpretation: the fact that the fetish is also a signifier means, for Lacan, that it could be as such re-articulated in the unconscious through analytic dialogue.

This gives us our last characteristic: Fetishism is the metonymic displacement of value from the lacking object beyond the veil onto a petrified sign.

## Conclusion

In this part, we discussed how Lacan expands the understanding of fetishism and tackles the lacunae in Freud's theory<sup>132</sup>.

We showed how Lacan's theory of object lack lies at the basis of his views on fetishism. This theory finds its roots in one of Lacan's early texts, "The Family Complexes" (1938). There, subject development is described as deploying across three complexes: the weaning complex, the intrusion complex and the Oedipus complex, all resulting in the objectification of a certain lack. We showed the parallel of these three complexes with the three moments of object lack: real privation, imaginary frustration and symbolic castration.

We discussed how the development of his object lack theory that allows Lacan to describe fetishism as a specific way of dealing with object lack, next to phobia and normality. We studied also how Lacan expands his notion of fetishism beyond his theory of object lack. Taking up Freud's – and indirectly, Binet's – idea of the sign-character of the fetish, Lacan situates the fetish as petrified between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. He conceptualizes what lies beyond the fetish, develops the perverse phantasm, and uses the concepts of screen memory and of the veil. Last but not least, mostly in Seminar V (1957), he puts the fetish in a linguistic context and describes it as the metonymic displacement of value from the lacking object beyond the veil onto a petrified sign.

Throughout our discussion of fetishism in and beyond Lacan's theory of object lack, we singled out some of the basic characteristics of Lacan's view on fetishism. When we combine these, we get the following image of fetishism:

Fetishism is a protection against anxiety, against the intrusion of the Real. Because the subject in fetishism *has not* been menaced by a castrating instance, he has not received the phallus symbolically; rather than to *have* the phallus, he aspires to *be* it. As such, the lack of the object is *not* introduced in a dialectic which gives it a dimension of law; for the subject in fetishism, the law is elastic; instead of having traversed the Oedipus, of being the heir of the paternal Law, he will try to take the position of founder of his own law. Accordingly, the subject in fetishism has to delude; he doesn't accept he lacks the object. He does not assume the maternal phallus as a symbolic object; instead, he tries to give back the mother's missing phallus by imaginary means. In order to attempt to deal with the untenable imaginary triangle, the subject in fetishism incessantly alternates between two positions: identification with the mother and identification with the phallic object. The fetish, symbolizing/imaginarizing the phallus, is an attempt to stabilize this situation. Notwithstanding his denial of lack, lack is still operational in fetishism. As a result, the subject in fetishism tends to a flooding towards 'passages à l'acte', which appear as momentary paroxysms, in which the lost object is found back in an imaginary fashion, but which cannot be symbolically ordered in the history of the subject, because the phallus as a binding signifier lacks. For the subject in fetishism, the difference between the sexes is thus not integrated. The fetishistic phantasm, standing in for this binding signifier, has a sign-character that situates it between the imaginary and the symbolic. It functions as a metonymic displacement of value from the lacking object beyond the veil onto a petrified sign.

Compared to Freud's theory on fetishism, the advantages are clear. Most importantly, with the characterization of the fetishistic 'choice' as an imaginary attempt to deal with privation, Lacan provides an answer to the 'Why?' of the fetishistic 'choice'. Secondly, the linguistic mechanisms at work in fetishism are clarified. Thirdly, the position of the subject in fetishism towards the law is at least partly clarified. Last but not least, Lacan's theory is



a step forward on the ladder of abstraction. Where Freud's theory was centered around one clinical fact, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus, Lacan generalizes this into a structural lack: privation of the phallus.

After Seminars IV (1956) and V (1957), Lacan's interest in fetishism slowly peters out. In Seminar VI (1958), he comes back to it only to explain the fetishistic character of the object of desire in general (1958, p. 217), and as an example of the distance the subject keeps to the object of desire (pp. 311-312). In his later Seminars, references to fetishism are rare and unsubstantial to Lacan's theory of perversion.

While both Freud and Lacan proposed, at a certain moment in their work, fetishism as the privileged paradigm to think perversion in general, we will argue that this paradigm is insufficient. It is only when Lacan makes the further abstraction from phallic object towards object *a* and from the mother to the Other that a truly generic conception of perversion can be elaborated, as the subject structure in which the subject strives to complete the lack in the Other with its own.

As we will show in the following chapters, the road towards this abstraction leads firstly through Freud's discovery of the death drive as the solution of the riddles of masochism and sadism. Secondly, this road leads through Lacan's development of the concepts object *a* and *jouissance*. It is the elaboration of these two concepts that will allow Lacan to rethink perversion on the basis of masochism and sadism as paradigmatic perversions. This approach will clarify what still stays opaque here: the relations of the pervert with his Other and with the drive. The result will be a generic theory of perversion, characterized by the subject being in the position of trying to supplement to the lack of the Other with his own.

## Conclusion to the parts on fetishism

In the first two parts of our doctoral thesis, we discussed Freud and Lacan's views on fetishism as the paradigmatic perversion.

In part 1 on Freud and fetishism, we studied how the early sexologists took degeneracy and heredity to be the root causes of fetishism and of perversion in general, but also that, in some passages of their work, their theorizations go further. The structural picture of fetishism that emerges out of these passages, is the following. For the subject in fetishism, the awakening of genital excitation is associated symbolically with a contingent exterior fact. This association crystallizes into a fetish, which operates as a sign in a language-based scenario that is instrumental for the regulation of sexual enjoyment.

Secondly, we examined Freud's ideas on fetishism. Freud starts from the idea that infantile sexuality is polymorphously perverse. One of these many forms is fetishism. It is the uncanny scene of the missing female phallus that is associated symbolically with a castration threat that can give rise to the crystallization of the missed object into a fetish, which is like a screen memory, covering over both the missing female phallus and castration.

In two key texts, "Fetishism" (1927e) and "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1940e [1938]), Freud restates his theory on the origin of fetishism and enlarges it to perversion in general. Therefore, in Freud, we can speak of fetishism as paradigmatic for perversion. Both papers also see Freud shift focus from the object of fetishism to the subject in fetishism, whereby he discerns three main characteristics: a rift in the ego, a language-based regulatory mechanism of sexual enjoyment – as exemplified by the 'glance at the nose' – and a disavowal of the possibility of castration and thus of sexual differentiation.

There are some blind spots in Freud's theory of fetishism. Firstly, he never comes up with an explanation of the fetishistic 'choice'. Secondly, the link between language, sexuality and perversion stays underdeveloped. A third blind spot in his theorization is that he never develops the idea of a specific relationship between the fetishist and the paternal law.

In part 2 on Lacan and fetishism, we focused on the development of Lacan's theory of fetishism, a theory that is tributary to Freud, but also fills in some of the blind spots Freud's theory left open. We discussed two steps in this development.

The first step consists in the construction of a theory of object lack. Lacan discerns three kinds of lack: frustration, as an imaginary dam, privation, as a real hole, and castration, as a symbolic debt. The subject of fetishism is depicted as the one who reacts to the mother's privation with a refusal of symbolic castration. In that sense, privation stays unresolved, and the subject of fetishism will have to 'give of himself'. Instead of acquiring the symbolic phallus through the acceptance of castration, he will try to 'be' the phallus by identifying with that what the (m)Other lacks.

In a second step, Lacan elaborates further on fetishism, expanding the Freudian concept of screen memory with the concepts of the veil and its beyond. This allows him to focus on the sign character of the fetish, reminiscent of Freud's 'shine on the nose'. Lacan thinks of the fetish as a metonymy, in which the value of one signifier is transposed onto another. While the fetish functions as a sign, it has the form of an image, which is like a screen that protects the subject in fetishism from castration anxiety. As image, it is non-dialectic and stays petrified. As such, it is not integrated in the symbolic order. As a result, for the subject in fetishism, the law is elastic; moreover, he will try to take the position of founder of his own law.

Compared to Freud's theory on fetishism, the advantages of Lacan's theory are clear. Most importantly, with the characterization of the fetishistic 'choice' as an imaginary

attempt to deal with privation, Lacan provides an answer to the 'Why?' of the fetishistic 'choice'. Secondly, the linguistic mechanisms at work in fetishism are clarified. Thirdly, the position of the subject in fetishism towards the law is developed. Last but not least, Lacan's theory is a step forward on the ladder of abstraction. Where Freud's theory was centered around two clinical facts, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus and the castration threat, Lacan generalizes this into a structural lack: the privation of the phallus, with which the subject in fetishism deals by imaginary means.

While both Freud and Lacan proposed, at a certain moment in their work, fetishism as the privileged paradigm to think perversion in general, we will argue that this paradigm is insufficient. What is lacking is a structural theory about the jouissance of the subject in perversion, and about its relation with the Other and with the lacking object beyond the phallus. It is only when Lacan makes the further abstraction from phallic object towards object *a* and from the mother to the Other, that a truly generic conception of perversion can be elaborated, as the subject structure in which the subject strives for jouissance by completing the lack in the Other with its own.

The road towards this abstraction leads firstly to Freud's discovery of the death drive as the solution of the riddles of masochism and sadism. Secondly, this road leads to Lacan's development of the concepts object *a*, the barred Other and jouissance. It is the elaboration of these concepts that will allow Lacan to rethink perversion on the basis of masochism and sadism as paradigmatic perversions. This approach will clarify what still stays opaque here: the relations of the pervert with his Other, with his object lack and with the drive. The result will be a generic theory of perversion, characterized by the subject being in the position of trying to supplement to the lack of the Other with his own.

## PART 3

### Freud on sadism and masochism: the stillness of the stones

## Introduction

We dealt with Freud's and Lacan's theories on perversion in general in the first part of this thesis through the lens of fetishism. As we have seen, this lens proves insufficient to account for the structure of the subject in perversion in general. They fail to do justice to the relation of the subject in perversion with the object, with the Other and with the drive, as we will see when we concentrate on Lacan and his theories of sadism and masochism. In this chapter, we'll concentrate on Freud's ideas on sadism and masochism,<sup>133</sup> without which Lacan's theories would be impossible. It is through his interest in masochism and sadism that Freud discovers the death drive, which, we will argue later, is the root of Lacan's concept of jouissance.

For Freud, sadism and masochism are crucial concepts that take a central place in his theory. Moreover, the riddle of masochism leads Freud more than once to review his meta-psychological theories drastically. We venture to picture how Freud's struggle to understand masochism runs like a red thread through a major part of his oeuvre.

In a first moment, stretching more or less from "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900a) to the "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d), Freud sees sadism as a primary drive and masochism as a transformation of it.

In 1900, the existence of the masochistic drive supports the cornerstone of Freud's theory on dreams, i.e. the idea that all dreams are wish-fulfillment. Freud links this masochistic drive to pleasure found in physical pain in normal/perverse masochism, and to pleasure found in humiliation and mental torture in mental masochism/obsessional neurosis.

In 1905, in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d), Freud's deals with sadism and masochism as drives or drive-components that are part and parcel of the polymorphously perverse infantile sexuality. Masochism is seen as secondary, as a

transformation of sadism. If these drives are too strong, they can fail to be subsumed under the sexual drive and remain as perversions. On the other hand, in this period Freud cursorily mentions some interesting, promising, but only half-connected concepts on which he will build later. He seems to sense the importance of sadism and masochism, but doesn't arrive at a satisfactory treatment – yet.

In a second moment, between “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) and “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918b), Freud does not study sadism and masochism in detail. However, the view of sadism as something not completely subsumable under the sexual drive slowly appears as a subtext in his writings. This is mostly the case in “On the Sexual Theories of Children” (1908c), “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy” (1909b), “A Case of Obsessional Neurosis” (1909d) and “The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis” (1913i).

In “From The history of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918b), Freud analyzes the sadistic and the masochistic drives in the anal stages of the Wolf Man, and describes the transformation of the one into the other in quite some detail. The key is the idea of an ‘admixture’ of the different drives. This admixture will be the subject of Freud’s “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c), in which he develops a drive-logic that provides him with the conceptual apparatus that will bring more clarity in his minute analysis of the transformation of the sadistic drive into a masochistic drive, while at the same time serving as a temporary veil for his doubts about the existence of a primal masochistic drive. At the same time, we see Freud’s conception of the drive slowly change from a physiological one to a more complex one, integrating language-based and metapsychological mechanisms.

In “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e) Freud goes further. The conception of sadism and masochism as drives moves to the background. He develops masochism and sadism – and by extension the perversions in general – as ramifications of the Oedipus complex and characterizes these perversions as intertwining repressed libido and guilt.

While Lacan will pick up this thread, Freud's later work returns to a drive-based theory of masochism and sadism.

In a third moment, from "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920g) onwards, the discovery of the death drive leads Freud to revisit his conception of masochism. Next to a primary, erotogenic masochism or masochism-as-a-drive, he discerns two other forms: feminine masochism and moral masochism. In feminine masochism, which is his term for masochism as a perversion, he stresses the passive attitude. Moral masochism and its connection with the superego are for Freud merely linked to obsessional neurosis. But for Lacan, they will form the basis on which he will build the analysis of the connection between sadism, masochism and ethics.

The main point in this third moment of Freud's thinking on sadism and masochism, is the "discovery" of masochism as a primary drive, as an instantiation of – and at the same time paradigmatic model for – the death drive. The influence of this idea on Lacan's work cannot be underestimated.

## Masochism as transformation of sadism

### The masochistic wish in dreams

In "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900a), Freud mentions the concepts masochism and sadism twice in the context of the elaboration of his theory on dreams. Firstly, we find the crucial idea that masochism is a derivative of sadism. The second idea of interest is Freud's distinction between normal and mental masochism.

The implicit definitions and first mentions of sadism and masochism are to be found in in the chapter on "Distortion in dreams", where the words sadism and masochism occur for the first time in Freud's work (1900a, p. 159). In the context of a discussion of dreams as



wishes, central to his thinking at that time, Freud discusses the idea that some dreams seem to lack this wish-fulfilling character:

The very frequent dreams, which appear to stand in contradiction to my theory because their subject-matter is the frustration of a wish or the occurrence of something clearly unwished-for, may be brought together under the heading of 'counter-wish dreams' (1900a, p. 159).

His thesis is that these dreams are anyway wish-fulfillments. He discerns two kinds of counter-wish dreams. The first kind are dreams of his analysands who's dreams seem to counter Freud's theory that all dreams are wish-fulfillments. Freud sees the motive of these dreams in the analysand's desire to prove their analyst's theory wrong. The second kind of counter-wish dreams, which are discussed in a few paragraphs Freud added in 1909, are more straightforward in their painful character. Freud discusses them as follows:

The second motive for counter-wish dreams is so obvious that it is easy to overlook it, as I did myself for some considerable time. There is a masochistic component in the sexual constitution of many people, which arises from the reversal of an aggressive, sadistic component into its opposite. Those who find their pleasure, not in having physical pain inflicted on them, but in humiliation and mental torture, may be described as 'mental masochists'. It will at once be seen that people of this kind can have counter-wish dreams and unpleasurable dreams, which are none the less wish-fulfillments since they satisfy their masochistic inclinations (Freud, 1900a, p. 159).

The main point here are the definitions: sadism is defined in a plain and straightforward way as the aggressive component of the sexual drive. Masochism, on the other hand, is defined as secondary, as a derivative: it is the reversal of sadism into its opposite.

It is clear that Freud speaks here about sadism and masochism as aspects of the drive, not as categories of perversion.

It is also of interest to stress how Freud's whole theory on dreams hinges on the existence of a masochistic drive: it is the existence of this drive that explains why the dreams that seem to challenge the kernel of Freud's theory, are anyway wish-fulfilling.

In order to see how Freud situates the masochistic drive, it is interesting to quote his analysis of one example of a punishment dream:

I will quote one such dream, produced by a young man who in his earlier years had greatly tormented his elder brother, to whom he had a homosexual attachment. His character having undergone a fundamental change, he had the following dream, which was in three pieces: I. His elder brother was chaffing him. II. Two grown men were caressing each other with a homosexual purpose. III. His brother had sold the business of which he himself had looked forward to becoming the director. He awoke from the last dream with the most distressing feelings. Nevertheless, it was a masochistic wishful dream, and might be translated thus: 'It would serve me right if my brother were to confront me with this sale as a punishment for all the torments he had to put up with from me (1900a, p. 159).

The fact to retain here, is that in the example masochism is linked with homosexuality, guilt and a punishment phantasm. In a footnote, added in 1930, accompanying the analysis of another punishment dream, Freud confirms this link between masochism and guilt: "Since psycho-analysis has divided the personality into an ego and a superego, it has become easy to recognize in these punishment dreams fulfillments of the wishes of the super-ego" (1900a, p. 476).

Another 'point to draw the attention to, and also linked to the idea of guilt, is the fact that Freud seems to distinguish two forms of masochism in the quote above: a presupposed 'normal' masochism and a specifically named 'mental' masochism. Where the 'normal' – i.e. perverse – masochist finds his pleasure by having inflicted physical pain on himself, in mental masochism – which is clearly obsessional neurosis – the pleasure is found in humiliation and mental torture.

We can summarize the ideas on sadism and masochism in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900a) as follows. On the one hand, sadism and masochism are seen as drives. Sadism is defined as the aggressive component of the sexual drive, while masochism is defined as secondary: the reversal of sadism into its opposite. The existence of the masochistic drive supports the cornerstone of Freud's theory on dreams.

On the other hand, Freud links masochism to pleasure found in physical pain in normal/perverse masochism, and to pleasure found in humiliation and mental torture in mental masochism/obsessional neurosis.

## The most common and the most significant of all the perversions

### *Classification, naming and definition*

The way Freud introduces sadism and masochism in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) is simple and straightforward. He calls them “the most common and the most significant of all the perversions”, and defines them initially briefly as “the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object, and its reverse” (1905c, p. 157). Here, Freud seems to speak of sadism and masochism as perversions.

Sadism and masochism both find their place in Freud’s classification of sexual aberrations (1905c, pp. 135-172). As said in the chapter on fetishism, the perversions or deviations in respect of the sexual aim fall apart in “sexual activities that extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union” and “sexual activities that linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim” (1905d, p. 150). It is in this latter part that Freud deals, next to voyeurism and exhibitionism, with sadism and masochism. The four perversions have the following in common: “the tendency to linger over the preparatory activities and to turn them into new sexual aims that can take the place of the normal one” (1905d, p. 150).

Freud cites Krafft-Ebing who created the terms ‘sadism’ and ‘masochism’, but also two other authors who preferred the term ‘algolagnia’, from the Greek words for pain and lust, using a single name for both perversions. He adds the nuance that the term algolagnia

“emphasizes the pleasure in pain, the cruelty; whereas the names chosen by Krafft-Ebing bring into prominence the pleasure in any form of humiliation or subjection” (1905d, p. 157). Obviously, this nuance prolongs Freud’s distinction of ‘normal’ and ‘mental’ masochism, as cited above.

For masochism, Freud introduces the term of ‘passivity’: a passive attitude is seen as the kernel of masochism, understood as a spectrum: “[masochism] comprises any passive attitude towards sexual life and the sexual object, the extreme instance of which appears to be that in which satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object” (1905d, p. 158).

Freud makes the same kind of distinction for sadism: there are “cases of sadism that are merely characterized by an active or violent attitude to the sexual object”, and cases in which “satisfaction is entirely conditional on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object”. He explicitly reserves the term perversion only for this last, ‘extreme’ instance.

### *The roots of sadism*

In “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), looking for the roots of sadism, Freud comes up with three explanatory factors.

Firstly, he searches these roots in a biological aspect of normal male sexuality:

The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness – a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position (1905d, p. 158).

To the question of the origin of the connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct, Freud doesn't have a definite answer. He cites the theory that this aggressive element of the sexual drive – the Standard Edition translates as 'instinct', but 'drive' is much closer to the German 'Trieb' – is in reality "a relic of cannibalistic desires – that is, it is a contribution derived from the apparatus for obtaining mastery, which is concerned with the satisfaction of the other and, ontogenetically, the older of the great instinctual needs" (1905d, p. 158).

A second, more original factor that helps to explain sadism as not only a drive, but as a way to relate to the drive that is proper to perversion, is what Freud calls a sadistic view of sexual intercourse: "If children at this early age witness sexual intercourse between adults [...] they inevitably regard the sexual act as a sort of ill-treatment or act of subjugation: they view it, that is, in a sadistic sense. Psycho-analysis also shows us that an impression of this kind in early childhood contributes a great deal towards a predisposition to a subsequent sadistic displacement of the sexual aim" (1905d, p. 158).

The impression in early childhood is reminiscent of Binet, while the displacement of the sexual aim prefigures what Freud will say about the vicissitudes of the drive.

In a paragraph on the sexual researches of childhood, Freud discusses the connection between romping and sexual excitation as a third, purely physiological factor: "One of the roots of the sadistic instinct would seem to lie in the encouragement of sexual excitation by muscular activity. In many people the infantile connection between romping and sexual excitation is among the determinants of the direction subsequently taken by their sexual instinct" (1905d, p. 203).

### *The roots of masochism*

Freud sees masochism as further removed from the normal sexual aim than sadism, even – as already mentioned in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900a) – as a transformation of the latter: "it may be doubted at first whether [masochism] can ever

occur as a primary phenomenon or whether, on the contrary, it may not invariably arise from a transformation of sadism. It can often be shown that masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object" (1905d, p. 158).

Note that the idea is taken one step further: there was no question of the self as sexual object when Freud discussed masochism in his dream-book. The drive undergoes here one more transformation: a turn-around.

In the 1905 edition of "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d), Freud immediately adds another important idea, without any further explanation or elaboration: "Clinical analysis of extreme cases of masochistic perversion show that a great number of factors (such as the castration complex and the sense of guilt) have combined to exaggerate and fixate the original passive sexual attitude" (1905d, p. 158). He continues: "Pain, which is overridden in such cases, thus falls into line with disgust and shame as a force that stands in opposition and resistance to the libido" (1905d, p. 159).

Note that Freud specifically links masochism with not only guilt – as in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900a) –, but also with shame, disgust and the castration complex, which are at the basis of what he will later call the superego. There is a strong link with masochism, as the footnote cited above indicates, but Freud does, alas, not elaborate at this point of his work.

### *Active and passive*

In his brief discussion of sadism and masochism in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d, pp. 158-159), Freud is not clear if he sees them as the vicissitudes of one drive, as two sides of one perversion or as two different perversions. Sometimes he clearly differentiates sadism and masochism, sometimes he speaks of 'algolagnia' in

general. He uses now and then the term 'sadistic drive' but also speaks about a 'masochistic-sadistic drive'; he also speaks of sadism and masochism as of the 'active' and a 'passive' side of one single perversion.

This distinction between activity and passivity is crucial. Freud counts them among the key differentiators of sexual life, which he connects to masculinity and femininity respectively. To Freud, this is the reason why sadism and masochism occupy a special position among the perversions (1905d, p. 159). He adds that the active and passive forms habitually occur together:

A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity (1905d, p. 159).

This claim of masochism and sadism being reversible, is actually, although belonging to the public domain, a very strange one, as we will see later.

Freud continues with an enigmatic sentence: "It is, moreover, a suggestive fact that the existence of the pair of opposites formed by sadism and masochism cannot be attributed merely to the element of aggressiveness" (1905d, p. 159). In this way, he shows that the problem of sadism and masochism is broader than the problem of aggressiveness, but he doesn't make the connection with the other factors – guilt, the castration complex and the displacement of the aim of the drive – that he cursorily mentioned when dealing with the roots of masochism.

### *Sadistic-anal phase*

Two more important ideas are developed when Freud analyzes the phases in the development of the sexual organization. In the first, oral, organization, which initially Freud calls cannibalistic, he claims that sexual activity has not yet separated from the

ingestion of food, and adds: “nor are opposite currents within the activity differentiated” (p. 198). When discussing the anal phase, which he calls sadistic-anal, he names ‘the opposite currents’ as the active and the passive one, which can only later in development be described as masculine and feminine – when the partial drives will be organized and subordinated to the reproductive function.

The way Freud describes the active and passive currents in this phase is at least quite remarkable: “The activity is put into operation by the instinct for mastery through the agency of the somatic musculature; the organ which, more than any other, represents the passive sexual aim is the erotogenic mucous membrane of the anus” (p. 198). Another characteristic of the sadistic-anal phase is found by Freud in what he calls ambivalence: in the sadistic-anal organization, “the opposing pairs of instincts are developed to an approximately equal extent” (1905d, p. 199). He does not elaborate.

The coupling between sadism and muscular pleasure is not new, but the connection between masochism and anal pleasure is. This gives us the following pairs of opposites:

Sadistic drive	Masochistic drive
Active	Passive
Masculine	Feminine
Muscular	Anal

Table 1 Pairs of opposites connected to the sadistic/masochistic drives

Seen in such a symmetric way, it is difficult to think of masochism as being merely a transformation of sadism; a symmetry of characteristics is logically more suited to denote two distinct concepts, i.e. two distinct drives.



When we add up the ideas about sadism and masochism in this phase of Freud's oeuvre, the result isn't a clear picture, but rather a set of interesting, promising, but only half-connected concepts. We can conclude that in this phases, Freud partly deals with sadism and masochism mostly as drives or drive-components, but also sometimes as a perversion or a pair of perversions. He seems to sense the importance of sadism and masochism, but doesn't arrive at a satisfactory treatment. In Freud's own words: "All that need be said is that no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been put forward and that it seems possible that a number of mental impulses are combined in it to produce a single resultant" (1905d, p. 159).

## Towards the admixture of the drives

### *Slow emancipation from the sexual drive*

In the period between "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d) and "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1918b), only sideways mentions of sadism and masochism appear in Freud's work. It is, however, interesting to trace the transformation of the connected ideas. Beyond showing Freud's hesitation about these drives-slash-perversions in this period, these ideas show how slowly the accent changes, and how the view of sadism as something not completely subsumable under the sexual drive gradually appears as a subtext in Freud's writings. This is the case in "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908c), "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909b), "A Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909d) and "The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis (1913i)".

When Freud discusses the sadistic view of coitus in "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908c), only the accent changes in comparison with his treatment of the sadistic view of coitus in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d). Here, Freud claims that the sadistic theory of intercourse is always formed, regardless of the amount of information

the infant has at his disposal: “children arrive in every case at the same conclusion. They adopt what may be called a sadistic view of coition” (1905c, p. 220).

In little Hans (1909b), sadism is mentioned as the tendency which is repressed by the little protagonist of the case-study: “hostile and jealous feelings towards his father, and sadistic impulses (premonitions, as it were, of copulation) towards his mother” (1909b, p. 139).

The sadistic drive is here clearly still seen as part of the sexual drive, hence the premonitions. Further in the text, Freud’s view shifts a bit:

I cannot bring myself to assume the existence of a special aggressive instinct alongside of the familiar instincts of self-preservation and of sex, and on an equal footing with them. It appears to me that Adler has mistakenly promoted into a special and self-subsisting instinct what is in reality a universal and indispensable attribute of all instincts – their instinctual [triebhaft] and ‘pressing’ character, what might be described as their capacity for initiating movement (1909b, pp. 140-141).

At this moment of his work, Freud thinks in terms of an interplay of two drives: the sexual drive and the drive of self-preservation. Sadistic impulses would here be a characteristic of both drives. They are ‘pressing’, ‘instinctual’ and linked to musculature and movement.

But Freud seems to hesitate: if sadism is not a drive on its own, how should it then be considered: as a vicissitude of the drive for self-preservation, or as one of the sexual drive? Where in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) he clearly stated that sadism was a component of the sexual drive, here he is much more careful. When he says he cannot bring himself to assume the existence of a special aggressive instinct, we could add: as yet.

In “Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis” (1909d), Freud’s case study better known as the Rat Man, repressed sadism performs a crucial function as well:

in the cases of unconscious hatred [...] the sadistic components of love have, from constitutional causes, been exceptionally strongly developed, and have consequently undergone a premature and all too thorough suppression, and the

neurotic phenomena we have observed arise on the one hand from conscious feelings of affection which have become exaggerated as a reaction, and on the other hand from sadism persisting in the unconscious in the form of hatred (1909d, p. 240).

Here, Freud clearly links sadism to obsessional neurosis. He leans to the thesis that sadism is a vicissitude of the sexual drive. It is love, but in its transformation into – unconscious – hate. On the background, he still holds to his view of ‘constitutional causes’ for sadism.

Oddly enough, in the analysis of Rat Man’s obsessional neurosis, where an unknown anal pleasure (1909d, p. 167) plays such a crucial role in the analysis of the case, the link between the anal and the sadistic is only touched upon sideways, and never explicitly analyzed.

This also goes for “The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis” (1913i), though in this text the sideways mention of anal eroticism is noteworthy because of the link anal eroticism – homosexuality – obsessional neurosis:

A stressing of this anal eroticism in the pre-genital stage of organization leaves behind a significant predisposition to homosexuality in men when the next stage of the sexual function, the primacy of the genitals, is reached. The way in which this last phase is erected upon the preceding one and the accompanying remoulding of the libidinal cathexes present analytic research with the most interesting problems. (1913i, p. 322)

This remoulding of the libidinal cathexes, from anal to genital and back, can be traced in detail in another case study: “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918b).

#### *The Wolf Man: admixture of the drives*

In “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918b), Freud analyzes the sexual development of the Wolf Man according to his theory of sexual development in stages. He describes how the sexual life of the boy was starting to enter the genital phases till the

development was arrested by the suppression of masturbation, which made it regress to the sadistic-anal organization. He distinguishes between the sadistic and the masochistic drives in this stage and describes the transformation of the one into the other in quite some detail.

He first depicts the sadistic drive in its straightforward, unrepressed, infantile form: "He began to be cruel to small animals, to catch flies and pull off their wings, to crush beetles underfoot; in his imagination he liked beating large animals (horses) as well. All of these, then, were active and sadistic proceedings" (1918b, p. 26).

Next, Freud turns to a description of sadism turning against the subject, transforming into masochism:

phantasies of quite another kind came up as well in the patient's memory. The content of these was of boys being chastised and beaten, and especially being beaten on the penis. And from other phantasies, which represented the heir to the throne being shut up in a narrow room and beaten, it was easy to guess for whom it was that the anonymous figures served as whipping-boys. The heir to the throne was evidently he himself; his sadism had therefore turned round in phantasy against himself, and had been converted into masochism (1918b, p. 26).

Remark here the stress put on masochism as a neurotic phantasm, as a repressed wish, that can come to the surface during analysis. This phantasm is, in our opinion, a source for Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e), published only a year later, where Freud speaks about four female and two male cases. In that text, oddly enough, Freud does not mention that the beating is on the penis. We will come back to this text in detail.

Thirdly, Freud describes the intricate series of transformations in the Wolf Man's development with the concepts of identification, sexual aim, sexual object and the pair of opposites active and passive. In a first phase the little boy identifies with his father. Secondly, his seduction by his sister puts him into a passive role, gives him a passive sexual aim, which makes him turn to his nanny as the object of his choice. Thirdly, the boy turns once more to his father, the identification now replaced by object choice, and the formerly active attitude by a passive one. His fits of rage, which had served active sadistic ends in relationship to his nanny, now become masochistic in purpose: "By bringing his naughtiness forward he was trying to force punishments and beatings out of

his father, and in that way to obtain from him the masochistic sexual satisfaction that he desired" (1918b, p. 28).

This analysis shows to which lengths Freud goes to refine his description of how sadistic impulses can turn into masochistic ones. But it is quite a bit further in the text that Freud comes to the kernel of the case-study: the primal scene on which he puts so much stress in the analysis of the Wolf Man. It does not only repeat the transformation of sadistic into masochistic impulses, but makes a link possible with Freud's theory on fetishism:

When the patient entered more deeply into the situation of the primal scene, he brought to light the following pieces of self-observation. He assumed to begin with, he said, that the event of which he was a witness was an act of violence, but the expression of enjoyment which he saw on his mother's face did not fit in with this; he was obliged to recognize that the experience was one of gratification. What was essentially new for him in his observation of his parents' intercourse was the conviction of the reality of castration – a possibility with which his thoughts had already been occupied previously. (The sight of the two girls micturating, his Nanya's threat, the governess' interpretation of the sugar-sticks, the recollection of his father having beaten a snake to pieces.) For now, he saw with his own eyes the wound of which his Nanya had spoken, and understood that its presence was a necessary condition of intercourse with his father. He could no longer confuse it with the bottom, as he had in his observation of the little girls (1908b, pp. 45-46).

Freud once more confirms here the importance of the original infantile theory of coition as an act of violence, of hate, hence as sadistic. But he also ventures the idea that this theory can change, in this case by witnessing the act, into a view of coition as a pleasurable act of love. This leads to the idea of the possibility of the mixture of hate and love in one and the same act. Moreover, this act can be seen as the proof of the formerly only feared possibility of castration. This allows us to understand how the Wolf Man could end up in the masochistic position, in the phantasm of being beaten by his father.

In line with what we said about fetishism, it is clear that the subject witnesses here the uncanny absence of the phallus in woman; the wound of which his Nanya had spoken.

Using the interpretative grid we discussed in the chapter on Lacan and fetishism, we can read the position of the little Wolf Man as follows. The child is confronted with some kind

of choice: to disavow the reality of castration, which leads to perversion as an outcome, or accepting it, which can lead to neurosis, a phobic or a normal subject. As the Wolf Man does not seem to disavow castration, he will not develop not into a pervert, but into a neurotic.

A third possibility would be for the subject to foreclose castration, and this is how Lacan interprets the case of the Wolf Man<sup>134</sup>. We will not expand on this idea, nor venture an opinion about the subject structure of the Wolf Man. What interests us here, is to continue to follow how Freud, through an analysis of this case, develops his concept of admixture of the drives, and applies it to the sadist and the masochist drives.

We point to the fact that the later vicissitudes of the Wolf Man's development include the formation of a phobia: a 'choice' for the 'phobic' solution:

The form taken by the anxiety, the fear of 'being eaten by the wolf', was only the (as we shall hear, regressive) transposition of the wish to be copulated with by his father, that is, to be given sexual satisfaction in the same way as his mother. His last sexual aim, the passive attitude towards his father, succumbed to repression, and fear of his father appeared in its place in the shape of the wolf phobia (1918b, p. 46).

It is only in a later stage that the little Wolf Man – according to Freud – develops an obsessional neurosis.

The sadist and masochist tendencies in the anal phase are here described as a predisposition to – and hence anterior to – obsessional neurosis:

In his sadism he maintained his ancient identification with his father; but in his masochism he chose him as a sexual object. He was deep in a phase of the pre-genital organization which I regard as the predisposition to obsessional neurosis (1918b, pp. 63-64).

This quote also takes up the idea of the admixture of the drives. While in the primal scene the same act could be interpreted as an admixture of hate and love, here we find a coexistence of sadistic and masochistic tendencies.

Once more, Freud underlines the link he finds between masochism and homosexuality:

The operation of the dream, which brought him under the influence of the primal scene, could have led him to make the advance to the genital organization, and to transform his masochism towards his father into a feminine attitude towards him – into homosexuality (1918b, pp. 63-64).

The expected, normal fate of the sexual aim of being beaten is a development into the sexual aim of being copulated with. The link between the masochistic tendency in the anal stage and homosexuality as a logic result of it, is clearly, although indirectly, stated.

When summing up the position of the four years old Wolf Man, Freud gives the key to the complexity of the situation: “we can only do justice to the apparent complexity of the state of affairs by bearing firmly in mind the co-existence of the three sexual trends which were directed by the boy towards his father” (1918b, pp. 63-64).

These three coexisting trends are the following: “in his unconscious he was homosexual”, “in his neurosis he was at the level of cannibalism”, while “at the same time the earlier masochistic attitude remained the dominant one” (1918b, pp. 63-64).

The key is the idea of coexistence, the already mentioned ‘admixture’ of the different drives. Here, the drives’ aim and object are clearly the same, but they differ qua level of organization: the ‘cannibalistic’, ‘masochistic’ and ‘homosexual’ current belong respectively to the oral, anal and phallic stages. This ‘admixture’ will be the subject of Freud’s “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c), providing him with the conceptual apparatus that will bring more clarity in his minute analysis of the transformation of the sadistic drive into a masochistic drive, while at the same time serving as a temporary veil for his doubts about the existence of a primal masochistic drive.

## The vicissitudes of the sadistic drive

In “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c), Freud’s in-depth analysis of the drives, he develops some earlier ideas on sadism-masochism. The case material from the Wolf Man is clearly put to good use and organized into a relatively consistent theory. He also deepens the link with obsessional neurosis. A minute analysis is necessary to follow his development.

### *The drive: aim, object and operations*

Freud distinguishes between the aim and the object of a drive – as said, we prefer to translate ‘Trieb’ as drive, not as instinct –: “The aim [Ziel] of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct... The object [Objekt] of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim” (1915c, p. 122). While the aim of a drive, which can be reached along different pathways, is unchangeable, the object is variable: it becomes assigned to a drive when it is fitted to make satisfaction possible (1915c, p. 122).

Freud sees drives as susceptible to five operations or ‘vicissitudes’: reversal of activity into passivity, reversal of the content, turning round upon the subject’s own self, repression and sublimation (1915c, p. 126). In the first part of his article, he concentrates on four drives – sadism-masochism and voyeurism-exhibitionism – in order to analyze two processes: firstly, the change from activity to passivity, and secondly the ‘turning round upon the subject’s own self’. Note that a change from activity into passivity involves a change in the aim of the drive, while a turning round of the drive upon the subject involves a change in the object of the drive.



### *A contradictory first approach*

In a first approach, Freud claims that in the named perversions, the active aim (to torture, to look at) is replaced by the passive aim (to be tortured, to be looked at) (1915c, p. 127). As for the possibility of a drive turning round upon the subject's own self, Freud is not very clear in his first analysis. He claims that

it is made plausible by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego [...] The essence of the process is thus the change of the object, while the aim remains unchanged. We cannot fail to notice, however, that in these examples the turning round upon the subject's self and the transformation from activity to passivity converge or coincide (1915c, p. 127).

So Freud actually claims two contradicting things: firstly, that for the 'turning round' of sadism into masochism, the object changes (from an extraneous object to the subject itself), but the aim (to torture) remains the same. Secondly, he claims as well that in the transformation of sadism into masochism, the 'turning around' coincides with the transformation from activity to passivity, which is a change of the aim of the drive.

### *Analysis in three phases*

To elucidate this situation, Freud's more detailed and thorough investigation of the transformation of sadism into masochism into three distinct phases brings solace, but adds extra complications as well. As often in his work, Freud turns to grammar and language as a means of elucidation. In other words, here, Freud clearly goes beyond the drives and turns to the Symbolic to explain the psychic economy.

The first, sadistic phase "consists in the exercise of violence or power upon some other person as object" (1915c, p. 127).

In the second phase, which can be found in obsessional neurosis, there is a change of object: the extraneous object is given up and replaced by the subject's self (1915c, p. 127). But about the change in the aim of the drive, Freud is, again, unclear.

First he says: "With the turning round upon the self the change from an active to a passive instinctual aim is also effected" (1915c, p. 128). A paragraph later he claims: "there is a turning round upon the subject's self without an attitude of passivity towards another person [...] The desire to torture has turned into self-torture and self-punishment, not into masochism. The active voice is changed, not into the passive, but into the reflexive, middle voice" (p. 128).

This 'reflexive, middle voice', is a grammatical term to depict a special mode of the verb in Greek. It is non-existent in English, but if we take as example for the active voice: 'I aggress him' and for the passive voice 'I am aggressed by him', we could translate the idea of a reflexive voice as 'I aggress myself'. The fact that in 'I aggress myself', the verb is actually in the active mode – namely it is I who aggresses (active), not I who is being aggressed (passive) – could explain Freud's equalization of passive and reflexive. But this reasoning forgoes that implicitly the statement 'I aggress myself' is logically included in the statement 'I am aggressed by myself'. This allows us to correct Freud and claim that in the case of obsessional neurosis, there is a double, an active and a passive aim: to aggress (myself) and to be aggressed (by myself).

It is only in the third, masochistic, phase, that we find a purely passive aim. In this phase, an extraneous person is once more sought as object: "this person, in consequence of the alteration which has taken place in the instinctual aim, has to take over the role of the subject" (1915c, p. 127).

To clarify this analysis, with which Freud seems to struggle, we propose the following schema:

Phase	Aim	Object	Model phrase
1 sadism	active (to aggress)	other	I aggress him
2 obsessional neurosis	active (to aggress)  AND  passive  (to be aggressed)	self	I aggress myself  AND  I am aggressed by myself
3 masochism	passive  (to be aggressed)	other	I am aggressed by him

Table 2: Phases in the beating phantasm

Interestingly, Freud states that in the third phase, satisfaction follows along the path of the original sadism, the passive ego placing itself back in phantasm in its first role, which has now in fact been taken over by the extraneous subject (1915c, p. 128). This leads him to affirm once more his doubts about the possibility of a direct, primal masochism: “Whether there is, besides this, a more direct masochistic satisfaction is highly doubtful. A primary masochism, not derived from sadism in the manner I have described, seems not to be met with” (1915c, p. 128).

### *A secondary sadism*

In a further complication, Freud seems puzzled by the question of what can account for the fact that the sadistic drive doesn’t only make one desire to master somebody, but also can specifically make one enjoy to inflict pain. The answer isn’t to be found in the pure infantile sadistic drive: “A sadistic child takes no account of whether or not he inflicts

pains, nor does he intend to do so" (1915c, p. 128). In the infantile sadistic drive, pain is just collateral.

The solution is much more convoluted. Freud firstly explains why pain can accompany sexual excitation in masochism, elaborating on an idea of "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d):

the pains are very well fitted to provide a passive masochistic aim; for we have every reason to believe that sensations of pain, like other unpleasant sensations, trench upon sexual excitation and produce a pleasurable condition, for the sake of which the subject will even willingly experience the unpleasure of pain.

In other words, at first sight, pain is just an obstacle on the path to pleasure. But Freud goes further:

When once feeling pains has become a masochistic aim, the sadistic aim of causing pains can arise also, retrogressively; for while these pains are being inflicted on other people, they are enjoyed masochistically by the subject through his identification of himself with the suffering object [...] In both cases, of course, it is not the pain itself which is enjoyed, but the accompanying sexual excitation – so that this can be done especially conveniently from the sadistic position. The enjoyment of pain would thus be an aim which was originally masochistic, but which can only become an instinctual aim in someone who was originally sadistic (1915c, pp. 128-129).

Remark the promising generic idea of the possibility of the satisfaction of a drive by identification, which seems contradictory, and to our knowledge is not further elaborated, and the related idea of an identification of the sadist with the suffering object, which we will deal with later. But there is another, surprising idea in this short quote. It sounds as if Freud now posits a 'secondary' sadism. This idea becomes plausible when we keep in mind that Freud sees the three phases of the drive – sadistic, obsessional, masochistic – as always coexisting and 'admixed' in different degrees – just like he described the three levels of the drive as always admixed in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1918b):

transformation by a reversal from activity to passivity and by a turning round upon the subject never in fact involves the whole quota of the instinctual impulse. The earlier active direction of the instinct persists to some degree side by side with its later passive direction, even when the process of its transformation has been very extensive (1915c, p. 130).

In other words, the 'secondary' sadism would be only a residue of the original, primal sadism – the part that is not transformed into something else. It is this process that leads to what Freud called ambivalence in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d), an idea he reintroduces here: "The fact that, at this later period of development of an instinctual impulse, its (passive) opposite may be observed alongside of it deserves to be marked by the very apt term introduced by Bleuler – 'ambivalence'" (1915c, p. 131).

#### *Auto-erotic stage of sadism – link with narcissism*

When Freud analyzes voyeurism-exhibitionism along the three phases he discovered in sadism-masochism, he notices a difference between both pairs of drives:

For the beginning of its activity the scopophilic instinct is auto-erotic: it has indeed an object, but that object is part of the subject's own body. It is only later that the instinct is led, by a process of comparison, to exchange this object for an analogous part of someone else's body (1915c, p. 130).

This auto-erotic, narcissistic start of the scopophilic drive makes Freud look for an equivalent in sadism. He seems to find this in another idea from "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", the encouragement of sexual excitation by muscular activity (1905d, p. 202), but decides not to retain it: "A preliminary stage of this kind is absent in sadism, which from the outset is directed upon an extraneous object, although it might not be altogether unreasonable to construct such a stage out of the child's efforts to gain control over his own limbs" (1915c, p. 130).

And it is this idea of comparison – to be understood as identification – that provides Freud with the possibility to explain the (second) change of object: from the extraneous

ego back to the narcissistic subject: “[Like in scopophilia] the transformation of sadism into masochism implies a return to the narcissistic object. And in both these cases the narcissistic subject is, through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego” (1915c, p. 132).

We remark that, oddly enough, in this scenario, Freud goes from a ‘sadistic’ to a ‘masochistic’ phase without having recourse to the in between stage of obsessional neurosis. Even more strange is the fact that he posits here strongly that which just above he did only posit tentatively, namely two distinct stages of sadism:

If we take into account our constructed preliminary narcissistic stage of sadism, we shall be approaching a more general realization – namely, that the instinctual vicissitudes which consist in the instinct’s being turned round upon the subject’s own ego and undergoing reversal from activity to passivity are dependent on the narcissistic organization of the ego and bear the stamp of that phase. They perhaps correspond to the attempts at defense which at higher stages of the development of the ego are effected by other means (1915c, p. 132).

This preliminary narcissistic stage of sadism of which the object is internal to the subject sounds very much like a disguised form of primary masochism. Of course, these internal objects the subject strives to control are here the limbs, and this has little to do with the idea of inflicting pain on oneself. Nevertheless, the idea of a primal drive where the subject takes itself as object is clearly present.

In a last remark on the turning round upon the subject’s own self of the drives, Freud distinguishes between object and source of these drives:

[For the other sexual drives, the] object is negligible in comparison with the organ which is their source, and as a rule coincides with that organ [...] in sadism the organic source, which is probably the muscular apparatus with its capacity for action, points unequivocally at an object other than itself, even though that object is part of the subject’s own body. In the auto-erotic instincts, the part played by the organic source is so decisive that, according to a plausible suggestion of Federn (1913) and Jekels (1913), the form and function of the organ determine the activity or passivity of the instinctual aim (1915c, p. 132).

According to this reasoning, there is auto-erotic sadism, with the muscular apparatus as the source. The object is different, but part of the own body. But what would that object then be, that the infant is trying to master with his muscular apparatus? Freud seems to suggest (see higher) the answer is 'his own limbs'.

But this quote poses a second, more important, question: what about the mucous membrane of the anus? Because when, for the auto-erotic drives, the source/organ is of such prime importance, we could ask which drive has its source in this organ, and what its goal is. Freud doesn't answer, but the logical answer would be: the drive is masochistic (because of the formerly made connection anal eroticism/masochism) and its aim is control over the fecal function. But the logic development of this omission would lead to contradictions: firstly, there would then be an auto-erotic masochism, a thesis Freud still does not accept. Secondly, the idea of masochism as sadism 'turning round upon the subject's own self' wouldn't make sense anymore. By extension the whole conceptual framework Freud uses to analyze the drive would be difficult to maintain.

### A child is being beaten

In this seminal text (1919e), Freud drastically changes the perspective from which he studies sadism and masochism.<sup>135</sup> Instead of focusing on sadism and masochism solely through the lens of the drives, as he did in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915c), here he demonstrates that perversions are not deducible from the functioning of the drive, but are organized by the Oedipal structure (1919e, p. 205).<sup>136</sup>

As Lacan will later put it:

In order to abandon the notion that perversion is purely and simply the emerging drive, that is to say the contrary of neurosis, one had to wait for the signal of the conductor, that is to say the moment when Freud wrote *Ein Kind wird geschlagen* [...] Perversion does not appear as the pure and simple manifestation of a drive,

but it turns out to be related to a dialectical context which is as subtle, as composite, as rich in compromise, as ambiguous as a neurosis (1957, pp. 230–231).

Freud's demonstration passes through the – partly language-based, grammatical – analysis of a common phantasm: "A child is being beaten".

Remark that Freud speaks here for the first time of a phantasm, a concept that will be of major importance of Lacan, who will come back more than once to "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e).

In Freud's minute analysis, masochism and sadism are alternatively used for referring to drives, perverse infantile sexuality, 'proper' perversion or perverse traits in 'normal' or neurotic subjects.<sup>137</sup>

Proper perversion, at this time, for Freud still means more or less the same as it did in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d): a sexual aberration, a deviation in respect to the sexual aim.

His new perspective will lead Freud to refine this standpoint, and say about the proper perversions that "the constitutional reinforcement or premature growth of a single sexual component is not shaken, indeed; but it is seen not to comprise the whole truth" (1919e, p. 192).

The more we advance in Freud's oeuvre, the more we see him move away from a relatively static view of partial drives towards more and more complicated transformations of these drives. This move is gradual and confusing: the more the drives are transformed, the more they seem to blur with metapsychological processes like repression and regression, till they can barely be recognized as drives.

At the same time, the transformations of the drives seem to become more and more grammatical, with symbolic procedures like the transformation of passive into active or reflexive into transitive, with the result that transformations of the drives become transformations of signifiers.



But there is more to be found in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e). As we will show, if we want this to yield its ‘whole truth’, we will have to explain how it allows Freud to put his finger on the link between masochism, guilt and the law.

Freud himself calls the phantasm, invariably connected with masturbation, a primary trait of perversion:

An infantile perversion of this sort can disappear: it can be subjected to repression, be replaced by a reaction-formation, or be transformed by sublimation. Or the perversion can persist. Whenever we find a sexual aberration in adults – perversion, fetishism, inversion – we are justified in expecting that anamnestic investigation will reveal an event leading to a fixation in childhood (1919e, p. 182).

Remark that here, Freud looks for an event, for a primal scene, one could say, to elucidate both sadism and masochism, just as he did when he looked for the roots of fetishism – in other words, he is looking for a traumatic origin.

The analysis of the phantasm is based on six cases. Four of these concern women, and are dealt with first. Further in the text, he will comment on what is different for men.

The female beating phantasms are developed in three phases, in the course of which four factors change: the relation of the subject to the phantasm, the object of the phantasm, its content and the significance. His analyses of the three phases are all structured around a linguistic kernel, around a signifying core. As the stress lies on the second phase, we will treat the first and the third phases only summarily.

PHRASE	Subject	Object	Content	Satisfaction
1 "The father is beating the child"	The father	The child	Sadistic	Sadistic
2 "I am being beaten by father"	My father	I	Masochistic	Masochistic
3 "A child is being beaten"	depersonalized	Unspecified children	Sadistic	Masochistic

Table 3: Phrases in the beating phantasm

The signifying core of the first phase (1919e, pp. 184-185) of the phantasm is: "My father is beating the child whom I hate". This phantasm is vague, not clearly sexually loaded and not in itself sadistic. But it is the mould which will later be filled with sexual and sadistic content. The hidden signification behind the phantasm is the fact that the idea of the father beating this hateful child, is an agreeable one.

The second phase (1919e, pp. 185-186) turns around the phrase: "I am being beaten by my father". The phantasm in this second phase is clearly pleasurable and masochistic. It is, as such, never remembered: it is a construction of analysis, but nevertheless indispensable for the comprehension of the final phase of the phantasm – Freud says that it is the most important phase (p. 185).

The significance of the phantasm is the fact that the lust for the incestuous object of desire causes guilt – it is thus quintessential Oedipal: "The sense of guilt can discover no punishment more severe than the reversal of this triumph: 'No, he does not love you, for he is beating you'" (1919e, p. 189).

This phase, however, is repressed, and this repression leads to a regression:

If the genital organization is met by repression, the result is that every psychical representation of the incestuous love becomes unconscious and a regressive debasement of the genital organization to a lower level. 'My father loves me' was meant in a genital sense; owing to the regression it is turned into 'My father is beating me (I am being beaten by my father)'. This being beaten is now a convergence of the sense of guilt and sexual love. It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation (with the father), but also the regressive substitute for that relation, and from this latter source it derives the libidinal excitation which is from this time forward attached to it, and which finds its outlet in masturbatory acts. Here we have the essence of masochism (1919e, p. 189).

Here, Freud speaks about the essence of masochism as a perversion – even if the four female cases discussed are certainly not cases of perversion. We see masochism emerge as something that fundamentally differs from a transformed drive. Two things are essential in it: the guilt-factor and the failure for the subject to remain in a genital organization.

Pleasure in pain is being analyzed as the consequence of a particular relation to the (paternal) object, which announces Freud's later discovery of the superego. This particular relation doesn't allow the subject to traverse the Oedipus; it is tainted, transformed by the Oedipus, but it makes the subject regress to a particular, pre-Oedipal fashion of dealing with libidinal excitation. One could say that the Oedipus fails to organize libidinal excitation into 'normal' pleasure.

Two important and formerly underdeveloped ideas resurface here: firstly, the idea of the connection between guilt and masochism. Freud is clear: the lust for the incestuous object of desire (the father) causes guilt.<sup>138</sup> This guilt is responsible for the repression of the phantasm. The phantasm, however, keeps its sexual content, which combines with the guilt. In other words: the pain of guilt becomes pleasurable. "Here", says Freud, "we have the essence of masochism" (p. 189).

Laurent (2007), in his excellent analysis of "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e), stresses that while this phase, in Freud's words, has never existed, it is nevertheless paired with intense pleasure, and, there where the pleasure is intense, there is no representation. He points out that Freud backs off from the idea that one could find in this phantasm: "This phase would be the pure voice of the conscience of guilt, and one would then have to put

one's finger on the genealogy of morality" (2007, p. 228). In other words, what Freud never finds is the pure expression of the conscience of guilt and its link with the death drive. While Freud will later discover the death drive, he will never link it to guilt. It is Lacan who will develop the voice of conscience as the object around which perverse structure is organized.

The second underdeveloped idea is that of the connection between a regression to the anal phase and masochism. "My father loves me", a phantasm with a genital sense, is repressed towards "a regressive debasement of the genital organization to a lower level" (p. 189), hence, to the anal phase. Remember that for Freud, a regression to a former phase, away from the genital phase, is characteristic for perversion as described in the "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905d).

This view of masochism – and of perversion in general – will be important for Lacan. As we will see, what in Freud is a particular relation to the paternal object, will be a particular relation to the object *a* and to the Other for Lacan.

But Freud doesn't pursue his thoughts on the essence of masochism in the sense that Lacan will later do. In his analysis of the third phase of the phantasm, Freud once more returns to the drives as main explanatory mechanism, a road that will lead him to think masochism as a primary drive, which will later lead him to conceptualize the death drive. This, in turn, will enable Lacan to think pleasure-in-pain as *jouissance* – as enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle.

The third and final phase of the phantasm (1919e, pp. 187-190) is represented by the phrase "A child is being beaten". The phantasm is accompanied by masturbation, and seems sadistic. Its hidden meaning is the following: "My father does not love this other child, he loves only me" (p. 188). The author of the phantasm quits the center of the scene and appears as a spectator, while the father transforms into a generic representative of authority. After analysis, it seems that it is not a child that is being beaten, but many unspecified children who are being beaten; the objects of the phantasm are faceless substitutes for the subject. The phantasm resembles that of the first phase

and seems to have become sadistic once more. It appears as though in the phrase, "My father is beating the child, he loves only me" (p. 189), the stress has been shifted back on to the first part (my father is beating the child) after the second part (he loves only me) has undergone repression. But only the form of this phantasm is – again, as in the first phase – sadistic. The satisfaction which is derived from it is – still, as in the second phase – masochistic. Its significance lies in the fact that it has taken over the libidinal cathexis of the repressed portion and at the same time the sense of guilt which is attached to the content of that portion.

The depersonalization is important, as Lacan will show, but unfortunately not developed by Freud. Suffice it here to say that it is clearly 'easier' for the ego to 'support' the phantasm of unspecified (male) children being beaten then to continue to identify with the victim.

Freud also analyzes the beating phantasm of his two male cases, which have three similar stages, but with a slightly different content. The original form of the – unconscious – male phantasm is: "I am loved by my father" (p. 189). The second stage, also invariably unconscious, has as its content: "I am being beaten by my father (p. 189). The conscious phantasm: "I am being beaten by my mother" (p. 190), takes the place of the third phase.

When Freud analyses the differences of the vicissitudes of the phantasm for boys, he dwells on the symmetries and asymmetries of the genders of the subject and the object in the phases of the phantasies. They are not our main concern here; the main thing is that, from our point of view, the phases of the phantasm are rather similar for boys and for girls. But some differences do stand out. While the four female cases, as Freud stresses, are not cases of perversion, the two male cases analyzed and other male cases encountered by Freud are probably, with the exception of the Wolf Man, all cases of perversion (1919e, p. 192). The second important difference is that in the second phase of the phantasm, the underlying love-object for the boys is not from the opposite sex. It is, just as for the girls, the father. While for girls, this is the normal Oedipal object, for the boys, of course, it is not. Another difference concerns the second, most important phase of the phantasm: for the male subjects, it can become conscious.

From those differences, only the fact that the love object for boys in the phantasm is an 'inverted' one seems to interest Freud. He stresses the female position the authors of these phantasm take, underlining the link he finds characteristic for masochism.

It is remarkable that Freud doesn't dwell upon the fact that he finds only masochism in male subjects, not in female, nor upon the fact that their phantasies can become conscious. Freud characterizes the fate for the women with a failed Oedipus as masculinity complex (p. 191), and leaves it at that.

The analysis of the male cases does not bring much new ideas, but Freud takes the occasion to stress once more the link passivity – masochism – femininity – homosexuality:

The boy's beating-phantasy is passive from the very beginning, and is derived from a feminine attitude towards his father. It corresponds with the Oedipus complex just as that of the girl does. But in both cases the beating-phantasy has its origin in an incestuous attachment to the father [...] In the male phantasy the being beaten also stands for being loved (in a genital sense), debased to a lower level owing to regression (1919e, p. 198).

The minute analysis of the three phases of the beating phantasm – for both sexes – allows Freud, as already discussed in the chapter on fetishism, to bring perversion in general in relation with incestuous desire and as such with the Oedipus complex:

[Perversion] first comes into prominence in the sphere of this complex, and after the complex has broken down it is left over, often quite by itself, the inheritor of the charge of libido from that complex and weighed down by the sense of guilt that was attached to it (1919e, p. 192).

We remark that a failing Oedipus is here seen as the root of perversion in general, and hence of sadism and masochism – notwithstanding the fact that only the male cases where masochists.<sup>139</sup> The reason for perversion-as-failure is still found in an abnormal constitution: "The abnormal sexual constitution has shown its strength by forcing the Oedipus complex into a particular direction" (p. 192).

Also remarkable is the fact that guilt is cited here as the factor that weighs down perversion, while in Freud's analysis of the second phase of the beating-fantasies for women, it was responsible for what we could call – in Freud's terms from "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915c) – the turning round upon the subject of the sadism, and hence responsible for the masochistic character of the phantasm. This only looks like a contradiction, which disappears when Freud once more claims there is no such thing as primary masochism, turning masochism into some kind of sadism that is 'weighed down', repressed and regressed (to the anal phase) by guilt: "Masochism is not the manifestation of a primary instinct, but originates from sadism which has been turned round upon the self – that is to say, by means of regression from an object to the ego" (1919e, pp. 193-194).

Also remarkable is the difference with the treatment of the phantasm of the Wolf Man, which clearly inspired one of the male cases in this text, but where the "I am loved by my father" phantasm is analyzed as a result from transformation of earlier different phantasms.

It is interesting to add that once more, there is a trace of Freud's doubts about his solution for masochism in an aside: "But passivity does not explain the whole of masochism. The characteristic of unpleasure belongs to it as well, a bewildering accompaniment to the satisfaction of an instinct" (1919e, p. 194).

By 1919, Freud acknowledges that perversion in general and masochism in particular are the result of a failed Oedipus. But he still can't explain how one can find pleasure in pain, even if the idea of guilt mixed with sexual pleasure comes close to the solution he will later discover.

The unease with his partial solution will lead Freud, only a year after the publication of "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e), to admit, loud and clear, a primary masochism.

## Primary masochism

The peculiar character of the sadistic and masochistic drives leads Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g) to make a radically new distinction, the distinction between death drive and Eros. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924c), he applies this new insight to sadism and masochism in detail. In the time between these two texts, but also after the second of them, some interesting paragraphs on masochism and sadism appear disseminated among some off-topic texts. The main point in this second part of Freud’s thinking on sadism and masochism, is the ‘discovery’ of masochism as a primary drive, as an instantiation of the death drive. As Laurent puts it: “Between 1919 and 1924, Freud radicalizes his point of view, since he presents masochism not only as one phantasm among others, but also as the privileged access to a real that is the death drive” (2007, p. 235).

## Beyond the pleasure principle

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g), Freud overhauls the ground of his whole meta-psychological view with the introduction of the death drive. One of the main reasons for this overhaul is Freud’s struggle to explain masochism and sadism.<sup>140</sup>

The most important source of Freud’s change comes from his discovery of an element of the drives he is not able to explain from the angle of the pleasure principle: the compulsion to repeat: “The compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed” (1920g, p. 20).

Freud discerns this inexplicable compulsion to repeat in dreams of people suffering from traumatic neurosis, in some children’s games, but also in sadism, masochism and in the negative therapeutic reaction (p. 35).



He finds the most direct impulse for the isolation of a compulsion to repeat in the massive apparition of war neuroses after World War I.<sup>141</sup> He is puzzled by the repetitive character of the nightmares of these patients, which seem to repeat incessantly the exact circumstances of the trauma (p. 13).

In the insistent repetition of these dreams, Freud finds his first material proof of a compulsion to repeat something that never was nor will be pleasurable. This discovery has major implications for the consistency of Freud's metapsychological theory; it even attains the foundation of Freud's key idea of dreams being always wish-fulfilling. Freud sees two possibilities: or one rejects the idea that all dreams are wish-fulfilling, and sees a compulsion to repeat –and as such something that defies the pleasure principle – as part of what dreams do, or one keeps the idea of dreams as wish-fulfilling, but is obliged to admit there are trends – masochistic trends – in the ego that cannot be understood from the pleasure principle (1920g, pp. 13-14). Both possibilities point in the same direction: there is something that escapes the realm of the pleasure principle, which one can call a 'death drive', a 'compulsion to repeat' or a 'masochistic trend of the ego'.

Freud finds a second proof for the existence of the compulsion to repeat in a children's game:

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it [...]What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o'. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da'. This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act (1920g, p. 15).

He relates this simple game to the child's need to learn how to deal with the apparitions and disappearances of his mother. What strikes him is, again, the repetition of a clearly unpleasant memory: "The child cannot possibly have felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent. How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle?" (1920g, p. 15).

Freud proposes two explanations, both related to the sadistic drive. Firstly, a drive for mastery:

At the outset he was in a passive situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasant though it was, as a game, he took on an active part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not (p. 16).

Secondly, a desire for revenge: “Throwing away the object so that it was ‘gone’ might satisfy an impulse of the child’s, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him” (p. 16).

A third and final example of repetition compulsion is found by Freud in a peculiar behavior of his analysands, the negative therapeutic reaction: “He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past” (p. 18).

But Freud finds the repetition compulsion with its three examples as such not strong enough to prove the existence of a death drive. In an attempt to add extra proof, Freud turns, as so often in his work, to biology. An analysis of this digression would lead us too far, but a quote of Schopenhauer illustrates the kernel of Freud’s biologic views well enough: “We have unwittingly steered our course into the harbour of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. For him death is the ‘true result and to that extent the purpose of life’, while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of the will to live” (p. 50).

The conclusion of his biologic excursion is somewhat less radical: “Thus our expectation that biology would flatly contradict the recognition of death instincts has not been fulfilled”. (p. 49).

Having obtained the permission of biology to continue his speculation, and at the same time adopting the term death drive for the repetition compulsion, Freud looks for another example for the newly minted drive. He finds it in the sadistic drive:

how can the sadistic instinct, whose aim it is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced

away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object? It now enters the service of the sexual function (p. 54).

This presentation of sadism as a death drive makes Freud – finally – reconsider his opinion on masochism:

Clinical observations led us [...] to the view that masochism, the component instinct which is complementary to sadism, must be regarded as sadism that has been turned round upon the subject's own ego. But there is no difference in principle between an instinct turning from an object to the ego and its turning from the ego to an object – which is the new point now under discussion. Masochism, the turning round of the instinct upon the subject's own ego, would in that case be a return to an earlier phase of the instinct's history, a regression. The account that was formerly given of masochism requires emendation as being too sweeping in one respect: there might be such a thing as primary masochism – a possibility which I had contested at that time (1920g, p. 54-55).

Freud finally admits to the existence of a primary masochism. But this quote raises a question. If masochism is a return to an earlier phase of the sadistic drive, and if this earlier phase is a 'primary' masochism, we get the following developmental schema:

primary masochism → sadism → secondary masochism

The question is then: if primary masochism is an earlier phase of the sadistic drive, does a primary sadism then (still) exist? Freud, as so often, doesn't provide an answer – yet. Having found in sadism and masochism examples of the death drive, he quickly turns his attention away from a further investigation of the perversions. Fortunately, he will take the question by the horns four years later, in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924c).

## Desire for castration

During the four years separating the two crucial texts "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920g) and "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924c), Freud elucidates briefly the

relation of sadism and masochism to castration – and thus to the Oedipus – in two more off-topic texts, both from 1923: “A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis” (1923d), and “The Infantile Genital Organization” (1923e). We find in both texts material that allows us to complete the schema of opposites we proposed above.

In “A Seventeenth-Century Demonological neurosis” (1923d), Freud discusses a case of obsessional neurosis in which “the unresolved conflict between a masculine and a feminine attitude (fear of castration and desire for castration) found clear expression” (1923d, p. 85).

This adds a new pair of equivalences to our list: masculine = fear of castration and feminine = desire for castration.

The masochistic phantasies the patient had developed “where wholly derived from a wish to accept castration; and he had even gone beyond these phantasies to real satisfaction in perverse situations” (1923d, p. 92).

Remark the ongoing confusion concerning the differentiation between perverse phantasies, perversion and perverse traits.

So for Freud, masochism seems related to a wish to accept castration. This calls to mind castration (in the sense of the outcome of the Oedipus) as a ‘solution’ to perversion, as we mentioned in the chapter on fetishism. There is a difference in accent, however: here, in the context of masochism, castration as a solution is wished for. Some of Lacan’s commentators, most of all Fink, will later generalize this for the whole of perversions.

In the same year, in “The Infantile Genital Organization” (1923e), another idea is ventured:

At the stage of the pregenital sadistic-anal organization, there is as yet no question of male and female; the antithesis between active and passive is the dominant one. At the following stage of infantile genital organization, which we now know about, maleness exists, but not femaleness. The antithesis here is between having a male genital and being castrated. It is not until development has reached its

completion at puberty that the sexual polarity coincides with male and female (1923e, p. 145).

The view that there is no question as yet of male and female in the anal organization, allows us to partially rewrite and expand the schema of the pairs of oppositions, and articulate it to the phases of the development of the drives. The following schema recapitulates Freud's theory of the sadistic and masochistic drives before he writes "The view that there is no question as yet of male and female in the anal organization, allows us to partially rewrite and expand the schema of the pairs of oppositions, and articulate it to the phases of the development of the drives. The following schema recapitulates Freud's theory of the sadistic and masochistic drives before he writes "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924c):

PHASE	POLE 1	POLE 2
Oral	Cannibalistic (undifferentiated)	
Anal	Active	Passive
	Muscular	Anal
	Sadistic	Masochistic
Oedipal	Masculine	Being castrated
Normal post-Oedipal	Male	Female
Perverse post-Oedipal	Fear of castration	Desire for castration

Table 4: Oppositions in the development of the sadistic and masochistic drives

## Masochism as an economic problem

When in 1924, Freud prepares a new edition of the “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), he integrates his new view of masochism as a primary drive in two footnotes to the text. In the first of these, one finds, neatly stated, what “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g) means for masochism and sadism:

My opinion of masochism has been to a large extent altered [...] I have been led to distinguish a primary or erotogenic masochism, out of which two later forms, feminine and moral masochism, have developed. Sadism which cannot find employment in actual life is turned round upon the subject's own self and so produces a secondary masochism, which is superadded to the primary kind (1905d, p. 159).

In 1905, Freud, doubting about the nature of sadism and masochism as perversions, puts it like this: “All that need be said is that no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been put forward and that it seems possible that a number of mental impulses are combined in it to produce a single resultant” (1905d, p. 159).

In 1924, he adds the second footnote specifically to this paragraph: “The enquiry mentioned above has led me to assign a peculiar position, based upon the origin of the instincts, to the pair of opposites constituted by sadism and masochism, and to place them outside the class of the remaining ‘perversions’” (1905d, p. 159).

Although it is clear that Freud is particularly interested in sadism and masochism among the perversions, he does not state here what exactly this different origin of the drives is. But one can safely assume that this is because sadism and masochism are to be subsumed under the death drive, while the other perversions would fall under the Eros.

It seems to be this idea that leads Freud to the detailed analysis of masochism in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924c), where he develops his view on this perversion in line with his overhaul in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g).

The question driving the whole text is how to re-articulate masochism in the light of the discovery of the death drive. For without the death drive, the economics of masochism are incomprehensible: “If mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle in such a way that their first aim is the avoidance of displeasure and the obtaining of pleasure, masochism is incomprehensible” (1924c, p. 159).

Freud turns to the distinction of the three forms of masochism, which he also mentions in his 1924 reedition of the “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d):

Masochism comes under our observation in three forms: as a condition imposed on sexual excitation, as an expression of the feminine nature, and as a norm of behavior. We distinguish an erotogenic, a feminine and a moral masochism. The first, the erotogenic, masochism – pleasure in pain – lies at the bottom of the other two forms as well. Its basis must be sought along the biological and the constitutional (1924c, p. 161).

One remarks that Freud still does not abandon the constitutional and the biological as the ultimate explanatory ground of masochism and seems to forget about his characterization of perversions as leftovers of a failed Oedipus.

While Freud’s quote might explain the masochistic drive – what he seems to call erotogenic masochism – it does not say how the drive can turn into a perversion – the one that Freud seems to call feminine masochism. We’ll analyze these three forms a bit more closely.<sup>142</sup>

### *Erotogenic masochism*

First, Freud delves up a physiological, quantitative hypothesis about the cause of masochism from “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d), and claims that the excitation of pain and unpleasure, among others, would contribute to the excitation of the sexual instinct: “In the case of a great number of internal processes, sexual excitation arises as a concomitant effect, as soon as the intensity of those processes passes beyond certain quantitative limits” (1924c, p. 163).

Freud mentions another, rather qualitative hypothesis about the cause of masochism, not in contradiction with the quantitative one. It has the additional benefit of linking the masochistic and sadistic drives. Both drives would be the consequence of the libido 'meeting' the instinct of death:

The libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfills the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards – soon with the help of a special organic system, the muscular apparatus – towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power. A portion of the instinct is placed directly in the service of the sexual function, where it has an important part to play. This is sadism proper. Another portion does not share in this transposition outwards; it remains inside the organism and, with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation described above, becomes libidinally bound there. It is in this portion that we have to recognize the original, erotogenic masochism (1924c, p. 163).

To resume: the libido operates on – or tames – the death drive and makes a portion of it go outwards: the sadistic drive. Another portion stays inside and becomes sexualized: the masochistic drive.

Obviously not satisfied with this description, Freud immediately adds another one:

If one is prepared to overlook a little inexactitude, it may be said that the death instinct which is operative in the organism – primal sadism – is identical with masochism. After the main portion of it has been transposed outwards on to objects, there remains inside, as a residuum of it, the erotogenic masochism proper (1924c, p. 164).

This is indeed a little bit inexact, and at odds with the former quote: one gets two different hierarchies. In the first quote, the death drive is structurally not on the same level as sadism and masochism: first there is the death drive, then the libido works in on it, then it gets whether driven outwards as sadism or stays inside as masochism. In the second quote they are on the same level: the death drive is identical with primal sadism and primal masochism.

This might seem a matter of detail, but it has the benefit of solving the unclarity left open in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920g) (see above). It makes the question of the primacy of sadism or masochism disappear, albeit at the price of a little inexactitude.



Moreover, the fact that Freud allows both of the cited quotes to exist next to each other, shows something of what one could call the incommensurability of the death drive and the libido: if one tries to operate mathematically with them, tries to add them and line their workings up in time, one is bound to end up with contradictions. In other words, the problem seems to be not – at least not totally – solvable in an economic way: there will always be an unexplained remainder.

The identity of primal sadism and masochism that Freud seems to propose in the second quote, does not mean, however, that there is no developmental perspective possible. This is nicely illustrated by a clarifying survey of the vicissitudes of the masochistic drive, articulated with Freud's three stages of psychosexual development, which coincides with the schema we proposed above:

The fear of being eaten up by the totem animal (the father) originates from the primitive oral organization; the wish to be beaten by the father comes from the sadistic-anal phase which follows it; castration, although it is later disavowed, enters into the content of masochistic phantasies as a precipitate of the phallic stage or organization; and from the final genital organization there arise the situations of being copulated with and of giving birth, which are characteristic of femaleness (1924c, p. 165).

Remark, in passing by, the use of the term disavowal in the context of masochism. Freud will develop the term in "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1940e [1938]) for perversions in general, as we explained in the part on Freud and fetishism.

The identity of primal sadism and primal masochism does not mean that the transformation of masochism into sadism and vice versa wouldn't hold. They do:

In certain circumstances the sadism, or instinct of destruction, which has been directed outwards, projected, can be once more introjected, turned inwards, and in this way regress to its earlier situation. If this happens, a secondary masochism is produced, which is added to the original masochism (1924c, p. 165).

It is this secondary masochism that Freud will call feminine.

All these quotes show that Freud stays quite puzzled by the ‘taming’ of the death drive by Eros. In order to deal with this, he gropes back to the admixture-idea that was so important to him in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c):

So far as the psycho-analytic field of ideas is concerned, we can only assume that a very extensive fusion and amalgamation, in varying proportions, of the two classes of instincts takes place, so that we never have to deal with pure life instincts or pure death instincts but only with mixtures of them in different amounts (1924c, p. 165).

Unfortunately, this admixture-idea explains away the problem, and doesn’t tell us anything about perversion.

### *Feminine masochism*

Feminine masochism is, of course, not about masochistic women.<sup>143</sup> It is actually a restatement of the equivalence masochistic = female = passive, with also the developmentally posterior vicissitude of it: a desire for castration and, thus, of a failed Oedipus. Feminine masochism is in this sense the ‘classic’, ‘adult’ masochism; masochism as perversion (Laurent, 2007, pp. 235-236; Sugarman, 2016, p. 125). Freud describes it as follows:

In masochistic phantasies the manifest content is of being gagged, bound, painfully beaten, whipped, in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience, dirtied and debased. The interpretation: the masochist wants to be treated like a small and helpless child, but, particularly, like a naughty child. The masochistic phantasies place the subject in a characteristically female situation. They signify being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby (1924c, p. 162).

Freud adds that the difference between these phantasies and the acting out of them are thin: “the performances are, after all, only a carrying-out of the phantasies in play” (1924c, p. 162). This is the most striking difference with the masochistic phantasies in neurotics: they are not carried out.

Freud comes also back on the idea of a sense of guilt in (feminine) masochism:

A sense of guilt, too, finds expression in the manifest content of masochistic phantasies; the subject assumes that he has committed some crime (the nature of which is left indefinite) which is to be expiated by all these painful and tormenting procedures [...] behind it there lies a connection with infantile masturbation (1924c, p. 162).

Freud uses this guilt factor to make the transition to the discussion of the third, moral, form of masochism. The result is that the idea of a connection between guilt and libido, of pleasure in pain, is not further developed.

### *Moral masochism*

In that sense, moral masochism is altogether another affair. Freud sees it as loosened from the connection with sexuality: suffering itself is what matters, with a sense of guilt as the determining factor.<sup>144</sup>

Guilt is an expression of a tension between the ego and the superego: "The ego reacts with feelings of anxiety (conscience anxiety) to the perception that it has not come up to the demands made by its ideal, the super-ego" (1924c, p. 167).

Freud describes it here as follows:

The super-ego is as much a representative of the Id as of the external world. It was formed by the introjection into the ego of the first objects of the id's libidinal impulses – namely, the two parents. In this process the relation to those objects was desexualized. It is how the Oedipus complex is surmounted. Kant's Categorical Imperative is thus the direct heir of the Oedipus complex. But the super-ego is also representative of reality, in the sense that the power of the parents was one of the most strongly-felt manifestations of reality. The Oedipus complex is the source of our individual ethical sense, our morality (1924c, p. 167).

Freud distinguishes between the unconscious extension of morality as in the quote above and moral masochism. In the former, the accent lies on the heightened sadism of the superego to which the ego submits; in the latter, it lies on the ego's own masochism which seeks punishment. The sadism of the superego and the masochism of the ego

supplement each other and unite to produce the same effects. But their difference lies in the consciousness: “The sadism of the super-ego becomes for the most part glaringly conscious, whereas the masochistic trend of the ego remains as a rule concealed” (1924c, p. 169).

This makes it understandable that Freud translates unconscious sense of guilt as meaning a need for punishment at the hands of a parental power.

But these few paragraphs on moral masochism leave one important question open: what has this to do with perversion? It doesn't fall under Freud's definition of perversions as a form sexual aberrations, and it seems to be close to obsessional neurosis and, even more so, to melancholia. In 1924, the answer is far from clear; one has to wait more than thirty years till Lacan makes a more convincing attempt to develop the link between morality and perversion.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on Freud's ideas on sadism and masochism, the riddles of which were the motor of some of his major conceptual revisions, most importantly of his discovery of the death drive. We discerned three moments in his theorization.

In a first moment, from “The Interpretation of Dreams” (1900a) till “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), Freud sees sadism as a primary and masochism as a transformed component drive in infantile perverse sexuality. Depending on the strength of these drives, they will be harmonized in ‘normal’ adult sexuality or they will subsist as adult perversions.

In a second moment, between “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905d) and “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918b), the view of sadism as something not completely subsumable under the sexual drive slowly appears as a subtext in Freud's

writings. He provides a problematic model of the logic of the transformations of the drives and their admixture in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915c), in which he focuses on the transformation of the sadistic drive into a masochistic drive. We draw attention to Freud’s doubts about the existence of a primal masochistic drive in this period, and to the slow change of his conception of the drive, which moves from a physiological one to a more complex one, integrating language-based and metapsychological mechanisms.

In “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), the conception of sadism and masochism as drives moves to the background. Masochism and sadism are seen as ramifications of the Oedipus complex, and characterized by an intertwining of repressed libido and guilt.

In a third moment, from “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g) onwards, and especially in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924c), Freud finally comes to admit masochism as a primary drive, as an instantiation of – and at the same time paradigmatic model for – the death drive. Next to and on top of this erotogenic masochism, he discerns feminine masochism – masochism proper – and moral masochism, the ‘need for punishment’ one can find in obsessional neurotic subjects.

There are some lacks in Freud’s theorizing about sadism and masochism, which Lacan will address. Firstly, Freud speaks about sadism and masochism mostly as drives. As a consequence, his theory on sadism and masochism as perversions stays rather poor, and he seldom reflects on the sadistic or masochistic subject in any depth. Secondly, while he mentions here and there the father – as desired object of the male child in the second phase of the beating-phantasm – and the sadistic superego – as playing a role in moral masochism – it is not clear how Freud thinks the object in relation to the sadistic and the masochistic subject. Fourthly, in close connection to this, Freud doesn’t have a conception of the Other, which Lacan will show to be crucial to think perversion structurally. Finally, the specific relationship of the sadistic and masochistic subject to jouissance and the law are barely touched upon.

As we will see in the next parts of our doctoral thesis, this will change with Lacan. But, and this is our main point, the germs for this change are here and there already present

in Freud's theorizing about sadism and masochism. The most important of these germs are the idea of perversions as ramifications of the Oedipus, the link between guilt and jouissance, the brilliant conception of sadism and masochism as instantiations of the death drive and the link between moral masochism and the superego.

## PART 4

Lacan on sadism and masochism before Seminar VII:  
towards a real object *a* and an incomplete Other

## Introduction

In this and the next three parts of our dissertation, we will entirely focus on Lacan's views on masochism and sadism. The division in four parts is due to the breadth and the nature of the material, but also reflects a chronologic and thematic logic. The parts are ordered around two significant moments: Lacan's seventh Seminar on ethics (1958) and his tenth on anxiety (1960).

In Seminar VII (1959), which we study in the fifth part of our dissertation, the key concepts object *a*, the Other and *jouissance* are entirely reminted through Lacan's original interpretation of Freud's death drive and its confrontation with texts from Kant and Sade. This confrontation is so rich that Lacan reworks and elaborates it profoundly in one of his most difficult and dense texts, "Kant with Sade" (1966), in which these concepts are confronted with the Sadean phantasm, which will be the basis from where Lacan will elaborate sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962). We dedicate the sixth part of our dissertation to the study of two key moments of this text. In the Seminar on anxiety, the object of our seventh and final part, the further evolved concepts object *a*, the Other and *jouissance* enable Lacan to develop a ripened vision on the paradigmatic masochistic and sadistic perversions.

Here, in the fourth part of our dissertation, we concentrate on Lacan's views on masochism/sadism before Seminar VII (1959). These, in turn, divide logically into two. Firstly, we will study Lacan's fragmentary dealings with masochism and sadism in his early work, up to Seminar V (1957). This early phase is characterized by the evolution from an imaginary approach of perversion towards a more symbolic one. Lacan's use of Sartre's concept of the gaze of the other to think scopophilia is here an important moment. It gives Lacan the impetus to conceptualize perversion in general, and sadism and masochism particularly as always intersubjective. Secondly, we will study how Lacan's view on sadism and masochism evolves to a more personal one in Seminar VI (1958) on desire. In the course of this Seminar, desire is



characterized as the defense of the helpless subject confronted with the desire of the Other. Desire is supported by the phantasm, written as  $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ . Lacan's attempts to characterize the object *a* move gradually from an imaginary towards a symbolic and finally a real point of view.

The link with perversion is provided by a generalization of Freud's theory concerning infantile polymorphous perverse tendencies, which Lacan sees as the origin of the discovery of the truth about perversion: there is no 'mature' object, no 'mature' drive, there are only partial objects – objects *a* – and partial drives. In other words, desire is, at bottom, perverse. But if all desire is perverse, how then to distinguish between neurosis and perversion as subject structures? In search for an answer, Lacan turns first to an analysis of exhibitionism and voyeurism, then to an analysis of perversion in general. We will study these closely, and pay special attention to the moments when Lacan touches sideways on the topics of masochism and sadism. We will see that Lacan fails to come up with a distinctive criterion; this will be found in the specific relationship of the subject with the jouissance of the Other, that Lacan will discover in Seminar VII and will elaborate in "Kant with Sade" (1966).

### Lacan on sadism and masochism before Seminar VI

Before Seminar VI (1958), Lacan speaks about sadism and masochism in different, only loosely connected places. Overall, in this period, three topics are discernable: firstly, Lacan's occupation with Freud's idea of a primary masochism and primary sadism and their relation; secondly, the idea that in perversion, the subject becomes an object for the gaze of the Other, exemplified by scotophilia and sadism, and thirdly an analysis of Freud's discovery of the phantasm in "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e), where Lacan generalizes the fetishistic object. As a general tendency, Lacan evolves slowly from an almost entirely imaginary view on sadism and masochism towards a more symbolic one. At the same time, he evolves from a Freudian perspective to a more personal one. Further, Lacan stresses the always already intersubjective and thus at least partly symbolical aspect of sadism and masochism.

## Sadism and masochism in Seminar I

In the first Seminar (1953), where Lacan analyzes the imaginary and symbolical orders through a reading of Freud's technical writings, the focus lies on the intersubjective relationship. Sadism and masochism are located at the hinge between the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

### *Primal cruelty and transitivity*

In the first moments of the Seminar, Lacan doesn't speak about sadism directly. He does speak, however, about a primitive kind of aggressivity. This comes close to Freud's *Bemächtigungstrieb*, translated as 'instinct to master', a term Freud uses to describe – at least before 1920 – a drive to dominate or seize the object by force.<sup>145</sup> It is directed from the outset towards external objects and is responsible for the primal cruelty of the child. It is non-sexual and fuses with sexuality only secondarily. As such, it can be said to precede sadism as a component of it and a precondition to it. In Freud's theory of the drive, it is linked to activity, maleness and to the muscular apparatus.

Lacan describes this primal aggressivity when he tells his audience that he has witnessed a small girl who "became very peaceably absorbed, at an age when she was scarcely walking on her feet, in the application of a good sized stone to the skull of a little playmate from next door [...] *Me break Francis head*" (1953, p. 172).

This primal cruelty is developed by Lacan as part and parcel of the mirror stage. Lacan claims that between 6 and 18 months, the other which is observed as in a mirror, functions as an image that provides the subject with the possibility to perceive his body and hence himself as a unity. It is at this moment that the infant recognizes its own desire. This 'mirroring' comes with an equivalence between 'me' and 'other' and with an unmediated urge to destroy the alienating image. Lacan calls this "the most fundamental

structure of the human being on the imaginary plane – to destroy the person who is the site of alienation” (1953, p. 172).

We could add: whether this person is oneself or the other. This idea of equivalence between me and other will be crucial for Lacan’s later development of sadism and masochism, as we will see in part VII.

Interesting is the link that Lacan makes with the symbolic level, where the equivalence between ‘me’ and ‘other’ is repeated in speech, in: “these phenomena of transitivity in which one finds the infant taking as equivalent his own action and that of the other. He says – François hit me, whereas it was him who hit François” (1953, p. 169).

At the same time, however, the imaginary unity of the mirror stage, which comes with a certain kind of transitivity, is a unity that comes from ‘out there’. Hence it is felt as alienating: “At first, before language, desire exists solely in the single plane of the imaginary relation of the specular stage, projected, alienated in the other. The tension it provokes [...] has no other outcome – Hegel teaches us this – than the destruction of the other” (1953, p. 169).

We interpret this “all-consuming, uncontrollable jealousy which the small child feels for his fellow being” (1953, p. 171), a phrase he borrows from Saint Augustine, as Lacan’s way to reframe Freud’s instinct to mastery<sup>146</sup> as intersubjective.

Based on the equivalence of ‘me’ and ‘other’, we stress that in the mirror stage, this primary aggressivity – where the child wants to destroy the alienating object – is at the same time auto-aggressivity and what we could call allo-aggressivity. Because there is no distinction between ‘me’ and ‘other’, the object the child wants to destroy is at the same time the child itself. It is precisely this ambivalence that makes the situation alienating, unstable and untenable.

As we will explain in the next paragraph, the way out of the alienating imaginary situation passes by a symbolic dialectization of both the primary allo-aggressivity and the primary auto-aggressivity. The best expression of this dialectization is to be found in the ‘Fort-Da’

game. It sketches the way the subject is introduced into the symbolical order as an issue out of the 'trap' of the imaginary mirror stage, a theme dear to Lacan since "The Family Complexes" (1938).

In the analysis of the Fort/Da, inexplicitly, the move from allo- and auto-aggressivity to primary masochism and primary sadism is made. The fact that this happens without reference to a sexual component of the drive, shows how thin the frontier between aggressivity and the primary masochism and sadism are for both Freud and Lacan.

### *Fort/Da*

The thinness of this frontier is the clearest when Lacan speaks, in response to a question of one of his pupils, of the masochistic outcome of the mirror stage (1953, p. 172). This leads Lacan to state that "when Freud described primary masochism, he found its most precise embodiment in the play of a child" (p. 172).

The game he speaks about is, of course, the Fort/Da game that Freud describes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920g, p. 15), and which Lacan sees as a solution for the subject to evolve out of the mirror stage. By throwing a bobbin away and pulling it back with a string, accompanied by the cries 'o-o-o-o' and 'daaa', simplified forms of 'Fort' (away) and 'Da' (there it is again), the child creates a basic linguistic opposition, in which, Lacan explains, "the child transcends, brings on to the symbolic plane, the phenomenon of presence and absence. He renders himself master of the thing, precisely in so far as he destroys it" (1953, p. 173).

In the above quote, the stress lies on the instinct of mastery, on the destruction, on the aggressive component of the sadistic drive. The masochistic aspect does not only lie, as Freud states, in the repetition of an unpleasurable experience, it also lies, as Lacan states – just like he did in "The Family Complexes" (1938),<sup>147</sup> in the fact that the object the infant destroys by symbolizing it, is the object of his desire:

it is in so far as the symbol allows this inversion, that is to say cancels the existing thing, that it opens up the world of negativity, which constitutes both the discourse of the human subject and the reality of his world in so far as it is human. Primal masochism should be located around this initial negativation, around this original murder of the thing (Lacan, 1953, p. 173).

This is very close to Lacan's dictum that "the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing" (1966, p. 319), a phrase he coins while commenting on the Fort/Da game in "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis". In a sense, this killing of the thing that brings the subject from the imaginary to the symbolic order, finds a parallel in how Lacan describes fetishism in his fourth Seminar, where the construction of the fetish object is described as an attempt of the subject to solve the untenable tension of what is called there the imaginary triangle.

Lacan situates primal masochism here clearly at the very joint between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. He puts it thus:

The masochistic outcome [...] – we cannot understand it without the dimension of the symbolic. It is located at the juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic. What, in its structuring form, is generally called primary masochism is located at this juncture (1953, p. 172).

At the same time, Lacan draws attention to the fact that the desire of the little infant, the desire for the object he murders in order to master it, is always already alienated, always already the desire of the other: "[...] the Fort/Da – it is in fact already in his solitude that the desire of the little man has become the desire of an other, of an alter ego, who dominates him and whose object of desire is henceforth his own affliction" (1953, p. 173).

The use of the concepts 'negativation' and 'the desire of the other' show how influenced Lacan still is by Kojève's reading of Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave (Kojève, 1946).

At the same time, Lacan also links, just as Freud did, primary masochism with the death drive: "The masochistic outcome [...] is located at the juncture between the imaginary and

the symbolic [...] That is also where one must locate what is usually called the death instinct, which is constitutive of the fundamental position of the human subject” (1953, p. 172).

The difference with how Lacan will deal with fetishism in Seminar IV (1956), is that here, in Seminar I (1953), Lacan sees primary masochism as constitutive for the subject in general. The idea of different possible solutions (i.e. fetishism, neurosis and phobia) from Seminar IV (1956) is not yet present.

### *Sadistic means intersubjective*

Further in the first Seminar (1953), Lacan turns to sadism. In his analysis, he goes much further than Freud. The main thesis is that the sadistic relationship, like any perverse relationship, is always already situated within language, is always an intersubjective relationship: “There is not one form of the perverse phenomena whose very structure is not, in every moment of its being lived through, sustained by the intersubjective relation” (1953, p. 214).

And why is sadism specifically intersubjective? Because, contrary to what is mostly held, it addresses the other as a subject. The intersubjective relationship in sadism, Lacan claims, includes a sense of consent: “[...] the sadistic relation can only be sustained in so far as the other is on the verge of still remaining a subject. If he is no longer anything more than reacting flesh, a kind of mollusk whose edges one titillates and which palpitates, the sadistic relation no longer exists. The subject in sadism will stop there, suddenly encountering a void, a gap, a hollow. The sadistic relation implies, in fact, that the partner’s consent has been secured – his freedom, his confession, his humiliation” (1953, pp. 214-215).

Here again, Lacan seems to draw on Hegel’s dialectic of the master and the slave. In Hegel’s parabola, the fight for recognition will be won by the party that dares his life, while

the one who holds his life too dear to wage, loses. While the winning party (the master) is recognized by the losing party (the slave), it is not a recognition that brings satisfaction. For the master is not recognized by a free subject, but only by a slave. In other words: the sadist can only enjoy a (free) subject, not a (slavish) object.<sup>148</sup>

Moreover, the sadistic relationship is characterized by a game-character:

most sadistic manifestations, far from being taken to extremes, remain rather on the threshold of execution – playing the waiting-game, playing on the fear of the other, with pressure, with threat, keeping to the forms, more or less secret, of the participation of the partner. You know the extent to which by far the largest part of our clinical experience of the perversions is restricted to the plane of an exclusively playful execution. We are not dealing here with subjects prey to a need. In the mirage of play, each identifies himself with the other (Lacan, 1953, p. 215).

The idea that it is not about subjects that are prey to a need prefigures the idea that sadism is not about a drive, but about something symbolical – about desire. This is clearly different from Freud's view. At the same time, Lacan still stresses the mutual identification of the subject in sadism and his partner, an indication that stays at least partly on the imaginary level in this interpretation of sadism.

In these few brief paragraphs, Lacan gives three important indications of what is at stake in sadism.

Firstly, what the subject in sadism looks for in the partners is the observation of consent, linked to the liberty of the partner, who ideally avows the humiliation, at the same time displaying signs of anxiety.

Secondly, Lacan holds that sadism mostly stays benign, stays a game, always on the threshold of full realization. We venture the hypothesis that Lacan holds this point of view because he does not yet properly distinguish between perverse traits and perversion as a structure. In our opinion, the playfulness he describes here, is characteristic for the sadistic traits one can find in the neurotic subject structure.<sup>149</sup>

Thirdly, Lacan stresses the idea that in sadism, it is about a certain kind of identification: what the subject in sadism does, is not to give into a direct, primitive drive, but rather to participate in an elaborate game. This includes, as we have seen above, a symbolic, and

thus intersubjective dimension<sup>150</sup>. Of course, this identification has an important imaginary component as well.

As said, in the first Seminar (1952), these ideas appear in the context of the elaboration of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in general, and are not elaborated upon specifically in the context of perversion. But it is to these ideas that Lacan will return in his Seminars VII (1959) and X (1962), where he articulates them with more sophisticated theories on sadism and masochism.

### *Primary masochism as malediction*

In Seminar II (1954), in two interesting paragraphs, Lacan deals with Freud's idea of difference between primary sadism and primary masochism, and with his 'discovery' of a primary masochism as motor behind Freud's second topic.

First, Lacan says that in Freud's theory before "Beyond the pleasure principle" (1920g), the pleasure principle might seem able to explain even "that what is related to death" (1954, p. 240). Following this logic, everything happens within the closed framework of a libidinal economy, based on the pleasure principle and a tendency to return to an equilibrium. According to Lacan, Freud, within this theory, has to explain aggression, and hence sadism, as imaginary identification: "The merging of the libido with activities which on the surface are at odds with it, aggressivity for instance, is put down to imaginary identification. Instead of beating up the other confronting him, the subject identifies himself, and turns against himself this gentle aggressivity, which is thought of as a libidinal object relation." (Lacan, 1954, p. 232).

The fact that Lacan is pointing to sadism when he speaks about aggressivity, becomes clear in the following quote, in which Lacan makes it very clear why Freud needed to go *beyond* the pleasure principle to explain (primary) masochism in a more acceptable and coherent way:



The significance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that that isn't enough. Masochism is not inverted sadism; the phenomenon of aggressiveness isn't to be explained simply on the level of imaginary identification. What Freud's primary masochism teaches us is that, when life has been dispossessed of its speech, its final word can only be the final malediction expressed at the end of Oedipus at Colonus, Life doesn't want to be healed. (Lacan, 1954, pp. 232-233).

Lacan insists here on the fact that primary masochism cannot be explained from an imaginary perspective only, but needs to be linked with the idea of a 'malediction', by the idea that death is the aim of all life, by the idea of some kind of intentionality towards death. This already points towards a need for the real dimension in order to come to a more operative view on perversion. This idea of 'malediction' will be an important source of Lacan's development in Seminar VII (1959). Of course, when we speak about 'real' in this context, it is in the signification it will get in Seminar VII (1959), as a re-thinking of the death drive, and not the 'Real' as Lacan uses it in Seminar II, where the concept is only vaguely developed as the realm of the absence of oppositions (1954, p. 97; p. 313).

### The subject becomes object... of the gaze

In Seminar I, reacting against object relationship theorist Balint, who claims that the relation to the object has to 'mature', Lacan analyses the phenomenology of perversion. He starts out by pointing provocatively to the child as a pervert – based on Freud's characterization of the infant's sexuality as polymorphously perverse –, and characterizes what he calls primary, pre-genital perversion as the case where perversion can be seen in a clear-cut and delineated fashion (1953, p. 214). He repeats that in perversion it is always about a relationship between two subjects (p. 214), i.e. it is not about a relationship between a subject and an 'immature', partial object.

In this context, Lacan (p. 215-216; p. 220; p. 224) refers to Sartre's phenomenological approach of the gaze in "Being and Nothingness" (Sartre, 1943, pp. 340-400). He takes up Sartre's idea that in our lived experience, the other distinguishes itself from every

other perceivable object in that it is 'un objet qui me regarde'; a French phrase translatable as 'an object that looks at me', but also as 'an object that is my business'.

Lacan describes this special relation, rephrasing Sartre's words, and emphasizes this relationship with the gaze of the other, a relationship that turns the subject into an object, as particularly anxiety-engendering:

I tried to show you this in the phenomenology of the perverse relation [...]. I thus centered the study of the imaginary intersubjective relation around the phenomenon, in the true sense, of the gaze. The gaze is not located just at the level of the eyes. The eyes may very well not appear, they may be masked. The gaze is not necessarily the face of our fellow being, it could just as easily be the window behind which we assume he is lying in wait for us. It is an x, the object when faced with which the subject becomes object (1953, p. 220).

Here, we see clearly that Lacan tries on the one hand to describe what happens in the perverse relation from an imaginary perspective. But at the same time Lacan already ventures beyond this purely imaginary aspect, as is most apparent in the idea of the 'x', a clear pre-figuration of the Other *and* of the object *a* as gaze, more importantly even, of the object *a* as linked to the Real.

In his analysis of the gaze, Lacan turns to sadism and scotophilia as examples and, just like Sartre, stresses shame:

I gave you an introduction to the experience of sadism [...] I pointed out that, in the gaze of the being whom I torment, I have to sustain my desire with an act of defiance, a challenge at every instant. If it does not rise above the situation, if it is not glorious, desire sinks into shame. This is equally true of the scotophilic relation. According to Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis, for anyone surprised in the middle of looking, the entire color of the situation changes, in one swerving moment, and I become a pure thing (1953, p. 220).

Here, the stress lies on the instability, the contradictory aspect of the perverse relationship: it is dependent on a set of conditions, and on the fact that the subject in perversion can lose its position at any instant: "Structurally, perversion such as I have

delineated it for you on the imaginary plane, can only be sustained with a precarious status which, at every moment is contested, from within, for the subject” (1953, p. 221). In other words, perversion, described on the imaginary level, is an unstable solution.

The importance of perversion, for Lacan at this time of his thinking, lies in the fact that it gives us a clear insight in the structure of human desire:

Perversion is an experience which allows one to enter more deeply into what one can call, in the full sense, the human passion, to use the Spinozistic term, that is to say what there is in man which is open to this division from himself which structures the imaginary, namely, between  $a$  and  $a'$ , the specular relation. It becomes a profound experience, on account of the fact that within this gap of human desire, all manner of nuances are called forth, rising up in tiers from shame to prestige, from buffoonery to heroism, whereby human desire in its entirety is exposed, in the deepest sense of the term, to the desire of the other (1953, p. 221).

In this quote it becomes especially clear that Lacan tries to think desire – and, by extension, perverse desire – in his first Seminar still from a predominantly imaginary perspective, from the specular relation, written as the relation between  $a$  and  $a'$ . It is also clear that this leads to an impasse: it describes perversion as a ‘situation’, moreover as an unstable situation, not as a subject structure. Moreover, it is in contradiction to his characterization of masochism as the basis for subject development early in the Seminar.

In these few paragraphs concerning the gaze, three things are important. Firstly, Lacan speaks about the gaze in connection to perversion – as said, the gaze will become one of the instances of the object  $a$  in Seminar X (1962). Secondly the fact Lacan describes perversion almost exclusively from an imaginary angle, which leads to an impasse, because it cannot grasp perversion as a structure. Lastly, and most importantly, the stress Lacan puts, in connection to perversion, on the peculiar relationship in which one feels oneself becoming an object for the other – pre-figuring the idea that the subject in perversion takes the object-position in the phantasm.

## A child is being beaten twice

### *A child is being beaten in Seminar IV*

We already discussed the main ideas on perversion to be found in Seminar IV (1956) in the context of our part on Lacan and fetishism. However, there is a passage on “A Child is Being Beaten” (1956, pp. 123-132) that we only dealt briefly with. It is interesting to revisit more in detail, because Lacan touches upon three important ideas: the desubjectivation in the perverse phantasm; once more the idea of a connection between the eye (and/or the Gaze) and perversion; and, most importantly, the generalization of the idea that in perversion, like in fetishism, unconscious speech freezes into a sign.

As a reminder, we briefly enumerate the three phases of the punishment phantasm:

PHASE	AGENT	OBJECT
1 The father is beating the child	The father	The child
2 I am being beaten by father	My father	I
3 A child is being beaten	depersonalized	A child

Table 5: Phases in the beating phantasm

In the first phase of the phantasm, the subject has the role of the one for whom the relation between the agent and the object is taking place, to let him know that something is given to him, namely the preference over the sibling. The object, Lacan says, is in this case the instrument of the communication of love between the agent and the subject (19 p. 127).

In the second phase, the situation is reduced to two subjects: it is dual, and this duality presents an ambiguity that Lacan sees – at least in this phase of his work – as typical for sado-masochism, and, more generally, for every dual, imaginary relationship (p. 128).

In the third phase, the subject is in a position of a third party, of a pure passive observant, just as in the first stage: a child is *being* beaten. Lacan uses the common French translation, 'On bat un enfant', omitting the passive voice from the original German (*Ein Kind wird geschlagen*). He comments on the 'on' in the formula, saying that one can vaguely find in it a paternal instance in general, but one where the father is not recognizable as such. In French, 'on' is an impersonal subject, which is absent in English and in German, where there is no subject in the phrase. Freud also says that *one* child (*Ein Kind*) is being beaten, but that the phantasms often deal with more, unspecified, children.

In other words, the phantasm breaks the agent and the object up into multiple specimens. This is correlative with the desubjectivation of the subject. Lacan says that "a radical desubjectivation of the whole structure remains, and at this level the subject is no longer there except as reduced to the state of a spectator, or simply an eye" (Lacan, 1956, p. 129).

Apart from the mention of the desubjectivation and of the idea of the subject as an eye, we draw attention to the triangular structure of this stage of the phantasm. In the Sadean phantasm that Lacan analyses in "Kant with Sade" (1966), this ternary structure of subject – object – agent will resurface, but in a different constellation: there, the subject will be the agent. We will return to that phantasm later and in detail.

Lacan summarizes the progression of Freud's phantasm during the three phases as follows: "After the reduction of the first intersubjective situation with its temporal tension, and the passage to the second situation, which is dual and reciprocal, one comes to the desubjectivized situation which is that of the terminal fantasy" (1956, p. 129).

Here, in his summary of the three phases, Lacan goes further than a purely imaginary interpretation. In order to introduce the Symbolic into his interpretation, he refers to the schema L that he created in Seminar II (1954, p. 243). This schema introduces the moment where the symbolic order and the big Other are articulated in Lacan's teaching. The schema summarizes how the imaginary relationship between ego (a) and other (a') traverses the symbolic relationship between the Es (S) and the Other (A). Lacan says:

“[...] we find ourselves in the presence of an element which takes its place on the line S-A, namely unconscious speech, which one has had to discover through all the artifices of the analysis of the transference” (1956, p. 129).

This element is the phantasm, which Lacan describes in generic terms as follows:

It bears in itself the evidence, still very visible, of signifying elements of the speech articulated on the level of that trans-object, if one may put it so, which is the big Other, the place where unconscious speech is articulated, the S in so far as it is speech, history, memory, articulated structure (1954, p. 130).

Just at this locus in his development, where he starts to use the symbolic dimension to analyze perversion, Lacan hesitates to point to a one-on-one relation between perversion and the perverse phantasm. Instead, he differentiates them: (p. 130). This hesitation will be, we will argue, one of the main characteristics of Lacan's failing attempts to isolate perversion from neurosis in Seminar VI (1958).

The property Lacan speaks about, is the desubjectivation of the situation. He sees it as lying at the origin of the phantasm:

There is something here like a symbolic reduction that has progressively eliminated the whole subjective structure from the situation leaving only a residue that is entirely desubjectivized, which is in the end enigmatic, because it retains the whole charge – but a charge not revealed, not constituted, not assumed by the subject – of what in the Other is the articulated structure in which the subject is engaged (1954, p. 130).

This desubjectivized residue – and the term residue will be of importance later, in the context of the object *a* – is a chain of pure signifiers that has lost all signification, all contact with the subject, and can thus be seen as pure signs. It is remarkable that Lacan, introducing the symbolical dimension to his interpretation of perversion, immediately introduces something of the real order as well – or at least something that will be important in his later development of the real order. Moreover, this desubjectivated residue is clearly an elaboration and generalization of the ‘speech frozen into a sign’ that Lacan found in fetishism.

Lacan links his analysis indeed back to fetishism, and, within fetishism, to “that beyond which has never been seen – and for good reason, – the penis of the phallic mother” (1954, p.130). Here, he states very clearly the likeness between the screen memory of the uncanny scene at the origin of fetishism with the perverse phantasm in general: “With the fantasy we find ourselves before something of the same order, which fixes the course of memory, reduced to the state of the instantaneous, by arresting it at that point which is called the screen memory” (1954, p. 131).

We retain three key ideas from Lacan’s analysis of “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e). Firstly, that in perversion, something is stuck at the imaginary level – the image as the frozen remnant of the uncanny scene, condensed into a screen memory. In this context, Lacan speaks of the “the valorization of the image” at the bottom of every perversion (1954, p. 131). At the same time, this frozen image that stands in for the missing object, produces ‘speech frozen into a sign’, in this case the phrase “A child is being beaten”. As such, the beating phantasm situates itself here between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Lacan puts this as follows: “This imaginary relation is on the way to what passes between the subject and the Other [...] and must again take on its full dimension in analytic dialogue” (1954, p. 131).<sup>151</sup>

Secondly, Lacan recalls that Freud shows in this text that perversion is not a survival of an irreducible partial drive. On the contrary, it is, just like neurosis, articulated with the Oedipus. Lacan says that Freud shows in the article that “any perverse structuration, as primitive as we may suppose [...] is articulable only as a means, a link, an element of something that, when all is said, can be conceived, understood, and articulated only in, by and for the process, organization, and articulation of the Oedipus complex” (1954, p. 132).

Finally, we also retain the idea that the Real is needed to think perversion more accurately.

### *A child is being beaten in Seminar V*

In Seminar V, Lacan analyses Freud's text "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e) once more, this time more in detail. The analysis coincides largely with Lacan's account in Seminar IV (1956, see above). But it also provides some new insights on Lacan's take on sadism and masochism. His aim with this renewed analysis is, so he states, to show "the essential insistence of the signifier in the formation of symptoms" (Lacan, 1957, p. 207). He even claims that what it is about in this text for Freud, is the intervention of the signifier – even when Freud lacks the concept of 'signifier'.

Lacan speaks about this insistence for both neurosis and perversion. In both, he finds the same mechanisms at work: compromise-formations, elusion, the dialectic of the repressed and the return of the repressed. In other words, and as claimed in Seminar IV: both neurosis and perversion are formed through the Oedipus (1956, p. 208).

Lacan tries to differentiate neurosis and perversion in another way. He rejects the idea that, while in neurosis the drive is repressed and avoided, in perversion they would appear naked, visible to the observer. However, he still claims that the drive appears in perversion, be it only partially: in something that is detached from the drive, moreover in something that is a *signifier* of the drive. It is here that one finds back the notion of 'sign' that Lacan used in Seminar IV (1956) to characterize the value taken by the fetish, and, by extension and generalization, by the perverse phantasm.

He sees what he calls the instrumental, detached elements in perverse phantasms as such signs, and cites the shoe and the whip as the most self-evident examples (Lacan, 1957, p. 208). But in order to clarify the function of these 'radical signs', one first needs to look at another element in the phantasm: the sibling.

To understand the stress Lacan puts on the role of the sibling in the formation of the phantasm, we refer to what we said in the chapter on fetishism about the phallus as a third term introduced in the imaginary relation between child and mother. We pointed out that in "The Family Complexes" (1938), Lacan sees the sibling as this third element, while



in Seminar IV (1956), it is the phallus that takes the function of mediating third term. In both works, it is the father as fourth, stabilizing element that will open up the symbolic dimension for the subject.

Here in Seminar V (1957), in a rather unexpected development, the idea becomes more sophisticated: in neurosis, the third term is the phallus, while in perversion, the idea of the sibling being this third element, resurfaces. But Lacan first describes the general case, where the phallus is used to 'symbolize' neurotic desire: "The phallus comes into play from the first approach of the subject to the desire of the mother" (1957, p. 215). There, the phallus has the key role of symbolizing the enigmatic desire of the mother, which, for Lacan, stands in for the signified in general – in other words, the phallus is the key signifier that keeps the system of signifiers together.

But it can be different. Lacan asks what happens when the subject is confronted with the imaginary place where the desire of the mother is situated, but this place is occupied (1957, p. 215). The occupier, of course, is here the sibling. But what happens? "The relation with the rival brother or sister [...] complicates the symbolical development, and necessitates a different solution, a phantasmal one" (1957, p. 215). And this different solution is precisely found in the first, pre-oedipal phase of Freud's masochist phantasm.<sup>152</sup>

What is the crux of this first phase of the phantasm? Lacan answers: "The father refuses, denies his love to the child that is being hit, the little brother or little sister" (1957, p. 212). And the significance of being denied love, is devastating:

this subject is attacked in this phantasy in his existence as subject, that he is the object of a punishment and that this punishment consists in denying him as subject, in reducing to nothing his existence as desiring, in reducing him as such to something which qua subject, tends to abolish him. This is the meaning of the primitive phantasy: my father does not love him; and this is what gives pleasure to the subject: the fact that the other is not loved, namely is not established in the relationship, which it, is properly symbolic (1957, p. 212).

Apart from the phantasm that the sibling, the occupier of the place of the desire of the mother, is reduced to nothing, Lacan also finds the introduction of a 'radical signifier' in

this phase of the masochistic phantasm: that with which is operated, the instrument: the whip (p. 217).

This whip, Lacan sees to say between the lines, refers to the big Other as master: “the one who holds the whip was from the earliest times the director, the governor, the master, and this is what is in question” (p. 217).

What happens now in the second phase of the phantasm, which Lacan says happens during the Oedipus? The phantasm in the second moment will take on a totally different value; it will change meaning. It is there that Lacan says find the enigma of the essence of masochism (p. 217).<sup>153</sup>

Firstly, Lacan remarks that being hit by the father (in the case of the girl) has the sense of a privileged relationship with the father: it is *she* that is being beaten. Freud reads it as a return of the Oedipal desire, the desire to be the object of desire of the father. It is the culpability of this desire that necessitates that she *makes herself be beaten* (1957, p. 212). This is expressed by a transformation of the unconscious message of the phantasm. The message which meant: “the rival does not exist, he is nothing at all”, is the same as: “you exist and you are even loved” (1957, p. 217). This emerges at the second moment in a regressive or repressed form, as a message that doesn’t arrive at the subject.

Secondly, the question is how this thing (the whip) that served to deny love (in ‘My father beats my sibling’), becomes the very thing which serves to signify love (in ‘My father beats me’). This moment is not only enigmatic, it is, also, according to Freud – so Lacan claims – the essence of masochism: “The message doesn’t arrive at the subject, but what remains is this signifier, i.e. the whip. This radical signifier becomes the pivot, almost the model of the relationship with the desire of the other” (1957, p. 217).

The idea of a ‘radical’, enigmatic signifier as model of the relationship with the Other, is reminiscent of the function of the fetish as described in Seminar IV (1956); there, in ‘abnormal’ Oedipal relations, it was the fetish that modeled the relation to the (m)Other’s desire.<sup>154</sup>

Lacan situates this enigmatic transformation in the double character of the signifier, here represented by the whip. The subject feels himself being abolished by being beaten, but

at the same time this degrading recognizes him as a subject. It is this double character that Lacan sees as constitutive for the masochist phantasm (1957, p. 221).

In the third phase, the phantasm acquires its final meaning, which Lacan reads as follows: “my relationship with the other is linked to the fact that to have entered into the world of desire means to be under the rod of, to suffer from this something which exists beyond, namely the law of the ruler (*‘la loi de la schlague’*)” (p. 243).

This final phantasm, according to Lacan, manifests an essential relationship of the subject to the signifier. But this essential relationship goes for both neurosis and perversion. In other words, Lacan’s dealing with perversion in the analysis of “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e) does not lead him to distinguish perversion from neurosis.

Summing up the ideas Lacan develops around sadism and masochism in connection with “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), we retain three key ideas: the idea that perversion is structured through the Oedipus, the fact that the whip functions as a sign, and the fact that the sibling can be seen as a mediating third term in perversion.

In Seminar VI, as we will see later, Lacan will generalize the masochistic beating phantasm he analyzes here into the fundamental phantasm as characteristic for the unconscious in general<sup>155</sup>.

### The stillness of the stones

Further in Seminar V (1957), in his analysis of Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g), Lacan points to two phrases that are linked to what one could call ‘the pain of being’.

Firstly: “The last resort of libidinal evolution, is to return to the stillness of the stones” (p. 218).

Secondly, he arrests the reader on Oedipus’ final words: it would have been better not to have been born (p. 219).

Both quotes are clearly linked to Lacan's earlier characterization of masochism as a malediction that we analyzed above. It presupposes a link with the death drive, to which both citations clearly refer. But at this point in Lacan's oeuvre, he doesn't have the conceptual tool at his disposal to articulate perversion coherently with the death drive.

Ultimately, for Freud, as stated in my chapter on Freud and masochism/sadism, what needs to be explained, what the existence of masochism poses to us as a riddle, is the question: Why does one seem to find pleasure in pain? Why does life propel itself to the stillness of the stones? Why would it seem better not to have been born? It is this very question that sustains the whole of Lacan's thinking in Seminar VII (1959), as articulated around *das Ding* and *jouissance*.

## Conclusion

As said, before Seminar VI (1958), Lacan speaks about sadism and masochism in different, only loosely connected places. In his search for a differentiation between perverse traits and perversion as such, Lacan tries different approaches.<sup>156</sup> We see in these approaches a parallel to the overall evolution in his work, with a first phase where he stresses the imaginary order, a second one with the accent on the Symbolic and a final one where the Real plays the key role. As shown above, these phases often intermingle and coincide.

Characteristic for the more 'imaginary' approaches in Lacan's early Seminars, are the repeated use of his mirror phase and, tightly linked to this, his use of the intrusion complex to think perversion – especially when linked to Freud's idea of primary sadism as undifferentiated from primary masochism and to Sartre's concept of the gaze of the other.

These ideas evolve and coagulate into a more symbolic approach with the characterization of primary masochism as a dialectization of primary aggressivity and

sadism, which have their parallel in Freud's discovery of the death drive. Lacan thinks dialectization in more than one place as the link between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, as such generalizing his idea of the fetishistic object from Seminar IV (1956) into the concept of the perverse phantasm as unconscious speech frozen into a sign in Seminar V.

These attempts, as we showed, failing to do justice to the real aspect of perversion, as epitomized by the 'malediction' of masochism. But alongside them, more novel ideas surface, which have their importance for Lacan's later theory on perversion. We pointed out the link with primary masochism and the death drive in the sense of life looking to return to 'the stillness of the stones', the idea that perversion is allays intersubjective – even if this intersubjectivity stays here still mainly Imaginary –, the idea that the subject takes the position of the object in the phantasm, the idea of the role of an observer, an actor and an object in the perverse phantasm and, last but not least, the idea of 'an enigmatic, desubjectivated residue', which seems to point towards the object *a* as real.

In his Seminar on desire (1958), which we will turn to now, Lacan will review some of his ideas on perversion through an important phase of his elaboration of the object *a*, which will lead to a number of new impasses that are, as so often with Lacan, fruitful for his later theory.

## Lacan on sadism and masochism in Seminar VI

In the sixth Seminar, Lacan stops relying on the transcendence of the paternal Law to grant the self-sufficiency of the symbolic Other. He evolves from the Name-of-the-Father as absolute, perfect symbolic Other towards the key idea of the incompleteness of the Other, as expressed in the formula “There is no Other of the Other” (1958, p. 206). Lacan occupies himself in this Seminar mainly with desire, the object *a* and the phantasm. In short, he sees desire as the defense of the helpless – a term Lacan derives from Freud’s ‘Hilflosigkeit’ – subject against the traumatic confrontation with a desiring and hence incomplete Other.<sup>157</sup>

Lacan claims that the desire of the subject is fixed: it is not linked to the object, but to the phantasm, which supports desire. While the phantasm in Seminars IV and V still was thought of exclusively as masochistic on the basis of “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), in Seminar VI the phantasm is generalized and crystalizes into a relationship between \$, the split subject, and *a*, the object of desire. Lacan writes it is as the matheme  $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ .

What was the object relation of Seminar IV (1956), becomes the phantasm in Seminar VI. Miller puts it thus:

Lacan presents this minimal formula [of the phantasm] as ‘the true form of the claimed Object Relation’ [...] The true Object Relation that was the theme of Lacan’s Seminar IV is to be found at the level of the fantasy [...] It means that, in Lacan’s sense, the Object Relation does not lie at the level of the drive (Miller, 2013, p. 3).<sup>158</sup>

In the same sense, the fetish object from Seminar IV (1956) becomes generalized into the object *a* in Seminar VI.

Lacan initially characterizes the split subject in the phantasm as referring itself to the imaginary other and to the Other as gaze. The object *a* in the phantasm is described as based on *i(a)*, the image of the other, as developed in the schema L and in the graph. In

the phantasm, both the split subject and the object *a* seem to have their roots in the Imaginary.

However, Lacan's repeated attempts to describe the object *a* from a purely imaginary point of view, fail. The whole sixth Seminar can be read as the history of these failures and as an attempt to refine the conceptualization of the object *a* accordingly. The further one advances in the Seminar, the more often the object *a* becomes endowed with symbolic and, albeit less explicitly, with real traits.<sup>159</sup>

The link with perversion is provided by a generalization of Freud's infantile polymorphous perverse tendencies, which Lacan sees as the origin of the discovery of the truth about perversion: there is no 'mature' object, no 'mature' drive, there are only partial objects – objects *a* – and partial drives. In other words, desire is, at bottom, perverse.

An understanding of perversion is crucial to understand the object *a* as partial object, and, by extension, as *real* – in other words, as an object that escapes imaginization and symbolization. Vice-versa is the understanding of the real character of the object *a* instrumental for a better understanding of perversion. Unsurprisingly, it is exactly when the object *a* acquires real traits in Lacan's descriptions that he makes the link between the object *a* and perversion.

In search of a clear distinction between neurosis and perversion as subject structures, Lacan turns first to an analysis of exhibitionism and voyeurism, then to an analysis of perversion in general. We will study these closely, and pay attention to the moments when Lacan touches sideways on the topics of masochism and sadism.

We argue that the conceptual tools available to Lacan at the time of this Seminar, more precisely his still inconclusive idea of the object *a*, do not allow him to discriminate clearly between perversion and neurosis. The analyses themselves, however, yield rich material that lay the ground for Lacan's approach of perversion in Seminars VII and X. For both those reasons, we comment on them in some detail.

## Desire, phantasm and object *a*

### *Object a as imaginary*

Desire is, first of all, the way in which Lacan translates Freud's 'Wunsch' (wish), but the concept also translates Freud's term 'Lust' (pleasure). Apart from the apparent Freudian influence, the concept is also rooted in Hegel's 'Begierde' (cupidity, desire in English) and Spinoza's 'Cupiditas' (idem). In the introduction of his Seminar, he cites the famous saying of Spinoza, "Desire is the very essence of man" (1958, p. 4). These multiple roots and their ramifications make the Lacanian concept of desire "a category far wider and more abstract than any employed by Freud himself" (Macey, 1995, p. 80).

In the beginning of the Seminar, Lacan defines the concept desire in a circular fashion (1958, p. 4), clearly based on Kojève's reading of Hegel. Kojève states: "Desire is human only if one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other [...] that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved', or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value [...] In other words, all human Desire [...] is, finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition'" (Kojève, 1947, p. 6). Lacan says that it is within this desire of the Other that the subject has to situate its own desire. But in front of this desire, the subject is helpless: "The fact is that in the primitive presence of the desire of the Other as opaque, as obscure, the subject is without recourse. He is hilfloss, Hilflosigkeit" (Lacan, 1958, p. 11).

We read this description of the subject as helpless in front of the desire of the Other as an abstraction and generalization of Lacan's description of privation in Seminar IV (1956), which we discussed in the chapter on Lacan and fetishism, where the mother missing the phallus places the helpless child in front of an enigmatic desire. But what Lacan gains in generalization, he loses in precision: while in Seminar IV (1956) he described a recourse to the Symbolic – in the form of symbolic castration – as the way out of this untenable situation, here in Seminar VI, that which keeps this enigmatic desire at bay is seen initially as something imaginary.



Lacan refers in this context to the function that desire held in the graph he developed from Seminar V (1957) onwards. He points to the intervention of an imaginary element of the relationship of the ego ( $m$ ) to the other ( $i(a)$ ) as being what is going to permit the subject to guard against the desire of the Other (1958, p. 27).

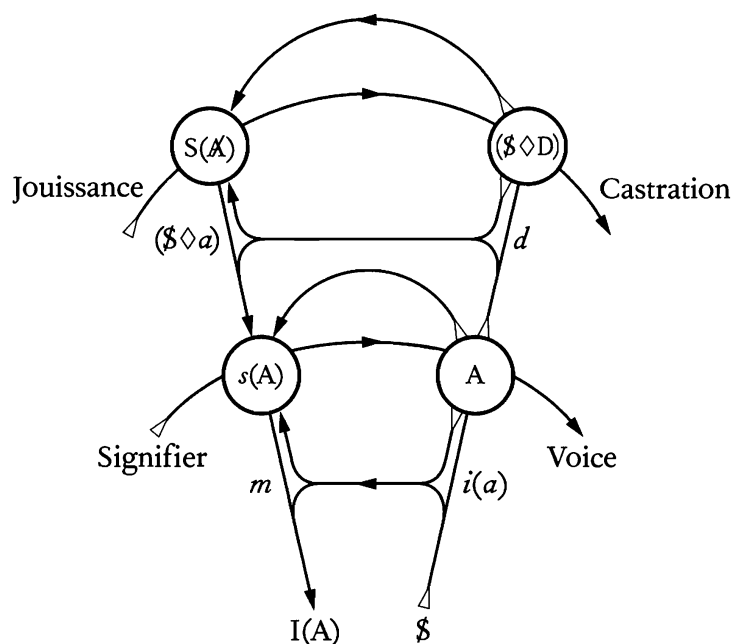


Figure 6 The Graph of Desire (Lacan, 1966, p. 817)

This relationship of the ego to the image of the other is reiterated higher in the graph, where we see a vector pass through desire ( $d$ ) and the phantasm ( $\$ \diamond a$ ). As such, it is, on a higher level, desire and the phantasm that guard the subject against this helplessness.

In the phantasm, the barred  $\$$  connotes here “the subject as a speaker, in so far as he refers himself to the other as gaze, to the imaginary other” (1958, p. 12), which leads Lacan to claim that every phantasm is articulated in terms of the subject speaking to the imaginary other.

Lacan sometimes refers to the *a* in the matheme of the phantasm as the image of the other (*i(a)*), sometimes to the imaginary other which is the object of desire, sometimes as merely *based on* or *rooted in* the image of the other, and sometimes as the object little *a*. Seen as such, the objet *a* is clearly first and foremost a concept based on the Imaginary.<sup>160</sup> As said, in the course of the Seminar, this will change. However, Lacan will continue now and then, till deep into the Seminar, to describe the object *a* in imaginary terms. He speaks for instance of the object *a* as “an imaginary regulation of that what supports desire”, as “the imaginary substratum of desire” (1958, p. 214), “an element which is otherness at the imaginary”, “image”, and “pathos” (p. 216).

Described as image of the *other*, the object *a* seems to concern a *person*. For instance, in his analysis of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, which takes up about a third of the Seminar, Lacan speaks of Ophelia as Hamlet’s object *a* (1958, p. 215). This is also a point of view that changes drastically in the course of this Seminar.

The importance for Lacan of the object *a* cannot be overestimated. He stipulates that the object *a* is that towards which “the whole modern articulation of analysis is directed when it tries to articulate the object and object relations” (1958, p. 215) In other words, he claims to have found the key to understand the object *in general*, and in a certain sense he is right, in the sense that there is no object in general, only specific, partial objects. But at this point in the Seminar, Lacan is only at the beginning of the elaboration of his concept of the object *a*.

### *Object a as more than imaginary*

However, already in the beginning of the Seminar, the object *a* is not seen as *merely* imaginary. To begin with, there is a first indication when, as stated above, in the phantasm, it is about a subject *speaking* to the imaginary other. The split subject is the subject which is traversed, split by the signifying chain, and while in the lower part of the graph it is about the relation of the imaginary ego (*m*) to the image of the other (*i(a)*), in the second stage of the graph it is about the split, symbolic subject – even if it is initially described as that what refers itself to the other as gaze – in relation to the object *a*.

Soon, Lacan starts to describe the *a* from a more symbolic perspective, for instance as the term of the phantasm in which the object takes the place “of that of which the subject is symbolically deprived” (1958, p. 215). This idea also explains *why* a particular object becomes object of desire: “It is therefore in so far as the subject is deprived of something which belongs to his very life, because this took on the value of what attaches him to the signifier; it is in so far as it is in this position that a particular object becomes object of desire” (p. 228).

As we saw in the part on Lacan and fetishism, in Seminar IV (1956) he spoke of three forms in which the object can lack: imaginary frustration, symbolic castration and real (de)privation. Hence, Lacan seems to use the term ‘deprivation’ here improperly. The citation only makes sense when we read it as symbolic *castration*, which is corroborated by the fact that Lacan states *which* object the subject is ‘deprived’ of: the symbolic phallus (1958, pp. 216-217).

In other words: in the phantasm, the subject is linked or fixed to the lacking object to which desire aspires, and which is here described not as the imaginary other, not as fashioned after a person, but after the missing symbolic phallus.

Lacan provides a telling example of the object *a*, that of the miser and his money-box, after an aphorism from Simone Weill’s “Gravity and Grace”: “To ascertain exactly what the miser whose treasure was stolen, lost: thus we should learn much” (Weill, 1987, p. 21).<sup>161</sup> The idea is here that the miser deprives himself of the use of his treasure because of his desire for it. This is easily turned around, into the idea that he desires what he is deprived of. As such, his treasure is not on the level of use-value; it is not an exchangeable object, but something entirely different and enigmatic.<sup>162</sup>

Discussing this example, Lacan links the object *a* – the miser’s treasure – once more to the fetish: “the relationship of the Miser with his money-box [...] seems to culminate for us in the most obvious fashion this character of fetish which is that of the object of human

desire, and which is also the character or one of the aspects of all his objects” (1958, p. 217).

This makes the link between Seminar IV (1956) and Seminar VI (1958) clear; the lacking object, in Seminar IV thought from the fetish (and the phobic object), becomes here generalized as the object *a*, as ‘the object of human desire’ in general.

But let us continue to trace how the object *a* changes character. Lacan states about the phantasm that “something fuller than [...] a person may [be] include[d] in it, a whole chain, a whole scenario” (1958, p. 218).

Lacan is vague about this ‘inclusion’, but the use of the term ‘chain’ points to the Symbolic, to the chain of signifiers, while a ‘scenario’ can be interpreted as a symbolic elaboration of an imaginary content.

In other words: the fact that ‘a whole chain, a whole scenario’ can be included in the phantasm, points to the failure of a description of the *a* as imaginary and to the need to describe it from another – here the symbolic – angle. The idea of ‘condensation’ would express this more precisely than the ‘inclusion’ put forward here.

This remark as well is reminiscent of Lacan’s ideas on fetishism in Seminar IV (1956). There it was the uncanny scene that was condensed into one frozen image, the fetish. There, the fetishistic object was described as ‘a sign’, and as such situated between image and symbol, between the imaginary and the symbolic registers.

At the end of the Seminar, the fetish is still the standard to think the object *a* as object of desire: “[...] The character of the [...] object of desire, should then be sought [...] in its most paradoxical form, [...] the fetish, this something which is always more or less implicit in everything which usually constitutes the objects of inter-human exchange, but is there no doubt masked by the regular, or regularized character of these exchanges” (1958, p. 341).

The *normal* objects, the objects of exchange, lose on the surface this fetish-character, this object *a*-character, because they are embedded in the Symbolic. Reversely, the

object *a* is precisely that what is not embedded in the Symbolic, that what is not exchangeable. On the other hand, the 'fetish' character of the object of desire is merely its disguise, and as such the disguise of the phallus.

At this point in the Seminar, Lacan arrests his development momentarily into a formula: "Desire has no other object than the signifier of its recognition" (1958, p. 341).

This formula seems contradictory with his former characterization of the object of desire as imaginary. The status of the object *a* in this stage of Lacan's evolution, is totally unclear. It is characterized as the image of the other, but can as well be more than a person, it can be a money-box, it is a substitute for the phallus, it can be a combination of elements, a scenario; it is not symbolic, but it is a signifier. One could ask naively: what is it then?

To come to a keener understanding of the way Lacan wrestles with the object *a* in this Seminar, we draw the attention to a passage where Lacan tries another approach, giving an enumeration of the possible objects *a*. The answer to the question 'What are they?' seems to be here: partial objects (1958, pp. 268-273). Lacan names four of them.

Two of these are pregenital objects *a*, of which the oral instance is the breast and the anal instance the excrement. It is characteristic for them to be able to be 'cut off' from or by the subject. A third object *a* is the phallus. It is, contrary to the pregenital objects *a*, not detachable. In Seminar X (1962), when Lacan comes back to this enumeration of objects *a*, he will come to see the phallus as detachable anyhow in detumescence.<sup>163</sup> In Seminar XI (1964), the phallus stops being counted among the objects *a*.<sup>164</sup> The aspect of being a result of a *cut* will remain one of the most salient features of the object *a*. Because of its link to the object as real, we return to it in the next paragraph.

The fourth instance of the object *a* is the voice, as it appears for example in schizophrenia. Lacan stresses the idea that this voice must not be confused with the superego, "the big voice [...] which represents the instance of the Other manifesting itself as real or as superego".<sup>165</sup>

Lacan will change this claim in Seminars VII (1959), X (1962) and XI (1963), where the superego as voice will itself be counted amongst the instances of the object *a*, of prime importance for understanding perversion. In these two last Seminars, Lacan also adds one more instance to its list, bringing the total of objects *a* to five: the gaze, which is absent from this enumeration, but present here and there between the lines in Seminar VI (1958), and, as shown above, in his handling of perversion in some of the former Seminars.

But alongside the filling in of the object *a* as partial object, and thus of another movement of Imaginarization, of a new reference to the phenomenological level, Lacan continues to move towards a more symbolic account of the object *a* and of desire. One of the clearest examples of how Lacan evolves from a conception of an imaginary relationship at the bottom of desire to a symbolic one, is given in the context of his analysis of Nabokov's "Lolita". In the final sequence of the novel, the perverse protagonist Hubert Humbert shoots Clare Quilty, the perverse pornographer who 'stole' Humbert's beloved Lolita. Lacan points out that "the pervert properly speaking [surrenders] himself, appears in an other, an other who is no longer the double of the subject, who is something quite different, who appears there literally as his persecutor, [...] the desire that is in question in the subject can only live in an other, and where it is literally impenetrable and completely unknown" (1958, p. 325).

In other words, the relation of the subject to the other is not enough to explain what happens in perversion; what is decisive for perversion – as for any other subject structure – is the quality of the relationship to the Other. Moreover, it is this relation that is ultimately condensed in the phantasm. This quote is also indicative of another structural trait of perversion that we will encounter further: the subject in perversion rejects his split subjectivity and strives to impose it to the Other, as Humbert here rejects his desire for the forbidden love object Lolita, and imposes this desire to Quilty.

### *Object a as real*

Some of Lacan's tentative descriptions of the object *a* go further, and hint at a need to describe the object *a* from the perspective of the Real.<sup>166</sup> This is what is hinted at for instance in the quote above where desire is characterized as impenetrable and completely unknown. But the hints become concrete when Lacan says that desire "is about [...] something real" (1958, p. 257). He also uses the same expression to describe what happens in the phantasm: "something real, on which he has a hold in an imaginary relationship, is raised to the pure and simple function of signifier. It is the final meaning; it is the most profound meaning of castration as such" (p. 257).

Here, Lacan confusingly uses the imaginary, the symbolic and the real registers at once to try to catch the object *a*. It seems he takes the object *a* here as real ("something real"), the relationship to it as imaginary (i.e. the phantasm,  $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ), and the function of the object *a* as symbolic. This is confusing, but it has at least the benefit to make clear that a definition of *a* as purely imaginary doesn't hold.

It is exactly when the *a* acquires real traits in Lacan's descriptions that he makes the link between the object *a* and perversion, which we will analyze further:

What is important in this properly structural element of the imaginary phantasy in so far as it is situated at the level of *a*, is in part this opaque character, the one which specifies it in its most accentuated form as the pole of perverse desire. In other words what makes of it the structural element of perversions, and shows us then that perversion is characterized by the fact that the whole accent of the phantasy is put on the aspect of the properly imaginary correlative of the other, *a*, or of the parenthesis in which something which is *a* plus *b* plus *c* etc. — it is the whole combination of the most elaborated [objects that can] find themselves reunited here according to the adventure, the sequelae, the residues in which there has come to be crystallized the function of a phantasm in a perverse desire (1958, p. 372).<sup>167</sup>

In this dense passage, Lacan does not only state the fact that the *a* can be a combination of elements ('*a* plus *b* plus *c* etc.'), pointing once more to an at least partly symbolic character of the object *a*. He also speaks about the elements — here in plural — *a* of the perverse phantasm as *crystallized residues*, an idea very reminiscent of Freud's

description of the fetish as a condensed 'memorial' to the 'horror of castration' (1927e, p. 154). Remark as well the idea of 'residue', of 'rest', to which we will come back below.

But, more important still is the fact that here, the object pole of the phantasm — and thus the pole of the object *a* — is linked to the perverse character of desire as such. We will come back to this important idea shortly.

Lacan, having enumerated the possible objects *a*, describes their function as follows: "to become the signifiers which the subject draws from his own substance to sustain before himself precisely this hole, this absence of the signifier at the level of the unconscious chain" (1958, p. 268). In other words: the object *a* is drawn from the Real (from the substance, from the *body* of the subject), but functions as signifier, with the aim of sustaining a lack. This idea of a signifier drawn from the Real makes one think of the beginning of Saint John's gospel, but in reverse: here, it is the flesh that has become word.

It is in this sense that Lacan's description of the object *a* as resulting from a cut bears fruit. Reacting against object relations theory, Lacan specifies how it is doomed to fail in its search of a description of the object (p. 311). He sees this failure in the diachronic character of its research, starting from the question how the object can evolve into a 'mature' object. While this idea of a 'maturation' of the object asks for a genetic, genealogical, diachronic approach to the object relation, Lacan stresses that an understanding of the object (as object *a* — at this point Lacan does not seem to distinguish the object from the object *a* at all) necessarily implies a synchronic approach, i.e. a structural one. He claims that one needs to deduct the object *a* as object of desire through an analysis of the relationship of the subject with the signifier.

It is in this context that Lacan says that all objects *a* have the structure of the cut, based on the idea of the interval in the articulated chain signifiers: "it is as cut, and as interval, that the subject encounters himself at the end point of his questioning. It is as well essentially as a form of cut that the *a*, in all its generality, shows us its form" (p. 267). See also: "in the phantasm the subject is present as subject of the unconscious discourse.



The subject is here present in so far as he is represented in the phantasy by the function of cutting [...] in [...] this discourse of the unconscious” (p. 324).

While the fetish-character of the object *a* is situated, as sign, between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the object *a* described as cut situates it here between the Symbolic and the Real.<sup>168</sup> For this idea of ‘cut’ is not only linked to discourse, but also to what is left over after the cut; i.e. to the idea of seeing the object *a* as what Lacan calls the ‘pound of flesh’ (p. 228).

A ‘pound of flesh’ is a figurative way of referring to a harsh demand or spiteful penalty as the consequences of defaulting on a desperate bargain. But in Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice”, the usurer Shylock, when the merchant Antonio comes to borrow money, demands a literal pound of flesh as security for the loan. Lacan certainly has this in mind when he refers to the object *a* as “this sacrifice of himself, this pound of flesh engaged in his relationship to the signifier” (p. 228). This makes the link with the Real, here in the form of the body that underlies the subject, particularly clear.

Another, less poetic, more mathematical way of presenting the object *a* as real, is to characterize it as a remainder, a residue in the sense of that which is left over after the division of the subject by the signifier (p. 264).<sup>169</sup> About this remainder, Lacan says that it is through this that “the subject supplies, pays the ransom, manages to replace the lack at the level of the Other, of the signifier which corresponds to him” (p. 264).

The idea of the subject supplying a lack, is important here. Later, it will be coined as ‘suppléance’, translated as ‘supplementation’, a concept that will be crucial to the later Lacan.

Elsewhere, Lacan describes this ‘ransom’ that the subject pays as castration: the object *a* “is what comes as a ransom for the fact that the subject cannot situate himself in desire without castrating himself, in other words without losing what is most essential in his life” (p. 261). This is, by the way, the easiest way to understand the object *a*: as Lacan’s abstraction and generalization of the object of Freud’s term castration.

But, to continue with the idea of supplementation: that which is supplied for, is the lack in the Other. This lack in the Other appears when the subject doesn't find anything in the Other that guarantees him; as Lacan says it in a catchphrase he mints in this Seminar: "There is no Other of the Other" (p. 207). To put it simpler: the Other is incomplete, something is missing. More precisely, confronted with the Other's desire, the subject can't find the signifier that would guarantee him, i.e. the phallus. When confronted with that lack, the subject 'fades'; Lacan speaks also of *aphanasis*, a term he borrows from Ernest Jones. This way of putting things is, once more, clearly a rewriting of, an abstraction and generalization of the idea of the subject's reaction to the uncanny absence of the phallus in the 'uncanny scene'. Where in Seminar IV (1956), it was the phobic object or fetish that came to supply for, to cover over this lack, here it is the object *a*.

The fact that the object *a* is best (at least also) approached from the angle of the Real, is shown most clearly when Lacan tries to answer the question as to how the subject must face up to the fact of being a split subject: "he must sustain it in his reality, of himself as real; namely indeed with what always remains most mysterious in him" (p. 265). Compare also: "[ $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ] does not designate a relationship of the subject to the object, but the phantasm, a phantasm which sustains this subject as desiring, namely at this point beyond his discourse where it is a question [of the real]" (p. 324).

At the very end of the Seminar, Lacan claims, this time clearly, that the object rejoins the real: "the *a*, the object of desire, in its nature is a residue, is a remainder. It is the residue which the being with which the speaking subject is confronted as such leaves to any possible demand. And this is the way that the object rejoins the real" (p. 341).

### The link with perversion

We come back to the link between the object *a* and perversion, a link, to go short, that is indispensable: without perversion, the object *a* would be unthinkable, and vice versa.

We note first of all that Lacan describes the phantasm as marked by a perverse trait, as, in essentia, perverse (1958, p. 214). In this, Lacan follows Freud's idea of 'polymorphous perverse infantile sexuality' as the basis of the phantasm:

after having articulated the functions of the unconscious, this quite particularly in connection with hysteria, neuroses and the dream, Freud was led to pose the presence in the unconscious of what he called polymorphously perverse tendencies. [This] is nothing other than the following: it is the fact that he had discovered the structure of unconscious phantasies (p. 310).

So the discovery of perversion, or at least of the polymorphously perverse tendencies, is prior to the discovery of the phantasm. For Lacan, unconscious phantasms cover something that is part of perversion, which he describes in terms Freud uses to formulate what happens in fetishism: "the phantasy of the pervert presents itself as something which one could call a sequence... cut off from the development of the drama" (1958, p. 310). For Lacan, the interest of these images lies in their isolation from the chain of signifiers, from the development of the drama, in the fact that they are the product of a cut.

This strand of thoughts leads him to claim that perversion can be 'interpreted': "This [sequence] replaced in its context, in its dramatic sequence, that of the subject's past, can in different degrees, indeed at the cost of some modifications, retouching, reverse transformations, take up again its place and its meaning" (p. 310).

In his ambition, Lacan puts perversion more than once on a par with neurosis, here in the sense that he claims they can both be analyzed. The consequence seems to be that psychoanalytic treatment for perversion might be feasible: "perversion is then something well and truly articulated, and exactly at the same level, as you are going to see, as neurosis, something interpretable, analyzable" (p. 219).

But Lacan also draws the attention to the fact that, as we already quoted above, "perversion is characterized by the fact that the whole accent of the phantasm is put on the aspect of the properly imaginary correlative of the other" (p. 218), i.e. on the  $a$  in the matheme for the phantasm,  $(\$ \leftrightarrow a)$ , while "neurosis is situated by putting an accent on the other term of the phantasy, namely at the level of the  $\$$ " (p. 218).

Here, Lacan again states an idea that will be key to a proper understanding of the difference between perversion and neurosis, and a tool to discern between both: it is about the same phantasms, but while in neurosis the accent lies on the subject-pole of the  $a \leftrightarrow$ , in perversion it lies on the object-pole – which is probably why Lacan will write the Sadean phantasm as  $a \leftrightarrow$  in “Kant with Sade” (1966).

Notwithstanding the fact that Lacan touches upon this idea on a few occasions in this Seminar, he does not seem to withhold it as *the* criterion to distinguish between neurosis and perversion. Instead, he continues to search for a way to articulate the distinction.

Lacan says that the relationship of the phantasm of the pervert with his desire shows the beyond of the subject, and claims this is the reason why, once the phantasm avowed — and he, once more showing his hesitation to distinguish between neurosis and perversion, specifically states: both for the neurotic and the pervert — there is an embarrassment, a ridiculous aspect, which is familiar to the field of comedy (1958, pp. 310-311).

We believe this comic trait is only present in neurotics; it is very reminiscent of Freud’s description of the reticence of the neurotic to avow the second stage of the beating phantasm in “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e). Later, when Lacan analyses the work and phantasms of Sade, the seriousness with which the pervert speaks about his phantasm will become apparent.

Lacan provides one more, less important, less elaborated, distinctive trait between the phantasm of perversion and the phantasm of neurosis: while the phantasm of the neurotic is ‘time-based’, the phantasm of perversion is ‘spatial’: “The phantasy of perversion I told you, can be named, it is in space, it suspends some essential relationship or other. It is not properly speaking atemporal, it is outside time” (1958, p. 219).

It is easy to link the idea of being based in time for the neurotic phantasm to the symbolic character of it: the symbolic chain has, with its one-signifier-after-the-other character,

necessarily a diachronic, historic, time-based character. It is distinctive for perversion that this lacks: as said while dealing with fetishism, there is something 'petrified', something 'fixed' about the fetishistic object, which has the character of a sign, not of a signifier. From this point of view, it is a small step to see the perverse phantasm as a-temporal and hence spatial. In "Kant with Sade" (1966), this spatial character will be elaborated, and the accent will be on the fact that it happens on a scene — a locus in space that is isolated from the witness, which will happen to be the Other.

Lacan deals in an interesting way with the object relation theorist's view on perversion. He mostly fulminates against their reaction to the discovery of perversion. He claims that the discovery of perversion leads them to attempt to define the object in evolutionary, genetic terms. This leads them to distinguish between the total, 'mature' and the partial object, a distinction Lacan condemns (1958, p. 311). For Lacan, all objects are partial; the object *a* is 'behind' *all* objects.

This genetic approach led the object relation theorists to prone an 'ideal' distance to the object. Initially ridiculing this idea of an ideal distance, towards the end of the Seminar VI, Lacan claims that this notion of distance is crucial: "this notion of distance is even so essential that after all, it may indeed perhaps be impossible to eliminate it as such from desire itself — I mean necessary for the maintenance, for the support, for the very safeguarding of the dimension of desire" (p. 311). This idea of desire needing to keep a distance with the object *a*, or, alternatively, to keep the object *a* at distance, is one of the key ideas in Seminar VII (1959). Here, it is important to see that desire is made possible by the distance between the  $\$$  and the *a*. This distance, in turn, is made possible by the phantasm.

When Lacan tries to describe the relationship of the subject to the phantasm, he sees two possible situations: a normal situation, in which the phantasm remains unconscious, and an atypical one, where it reaches consciousness, "at certain phases, and phases which are inscribed more or less in the pathological order" (p. 214). He calls these phases "moments of breakthrough [...] moments of communication" (p. 214).

This might seem as a distinction that could illuminate further the difference between neurosis and perversion, where in neurosis, the perverse phantasm would remain unconscious and in perversion the (perverse) phantasm would be accessible to consciousness. However, while analyzing what he calls “the moment of craziness of Hamlet’s desire” (p.214), Lacan indicates that *both* the normal and the abnormal situation can be found in neurosis, and as such makes consciousness of the perverse phantasm unusable as distinctive criterion.

This blurriness, this incapacity to distinguish clearly between perversion and neurosis in relation to the phantasm continues through the whole of Seminar VI: Lacan at certain moments separates the phantasms of the neurotic from the phantasms of the subject in perversion, at other moments, he doesn’t distinguish them at all.<sup>170</sup>

Notwithstanding this unclarity, Lacan articulates quite some interesting ideas on desire in perversion. When he attempts to describe the function of desire in perversion, he turns to scopophilia; first, he analyzes exhibitionism, then, voyeurism (1958, p. 293 ff.).

### *Scopophilia*

Lacan speaks of a scopophilic drive and of the idea of ‘donner à voir’ (1958, p. 293) – a phase that is difficult to translate. Literally, it means ‘to give to see’, in the sense of ‘presenting something to the gaze of the other’. Strangely enough, Lacan doesn’t directly speak of the eye or of the gaze, an odd lacunae in the context of scopophilia, certainly when one knows that the gaze will be part of the list of objects *a*. A few paragraphs further in the Seminar, he does mention the eye briefly, but without making the link with the object *a*, when he refers to “La révolte des anges” of Anatol France, in which he sees: “the very precise link which unites the dialectic of desire with this sort of virtuality of an eye which is ungraspable but always imaginable” (Lacan, 1958, p. 295). This idea of an ungraspable eye will be key in the development of the gaze as object *a*.

Lacan describes voyeurism and exhibitionism (p. 298) as two asymmetric positions of two subjects: one who shows himself and the other who sees. Later on, Lacan will say something similar about the asymmetry of the 'couple' sadist-masochist.

In his analysis of exhibitionism, Lacan lays the accent on the relation with the Other. In exhibitionism, the 'partner' must be "struck at the level of his complicitous desire" (p. 293); in other words, for the exhibitionist, the Other is necessarily a *partner*, who's desire is involved. This "donner à voir" is described as a breach, which is also a trap for desire (p. 294). Remark that Ophelia, as Hamlet's object *a*, was also referred to as Hamlet's 'trap' or 'lure' (p. 212).

This idea of 'trapping', of provoking the desire of the Other will be crucial in Seminar X (1962). Here, Lacan reformulates it as follows: "The desire of the Other is there then as an essential element in so far as it is surprised, as it is involved beyond modesty [*pudeur* in French], that on occasion it is complicitous" (1958, p. 294). This 'beyond' of the modesty seems, moreover, to point to the importance the concept of *jouissance* will be bestowed with later, so crucial to Lacan's more mature views on perversion.

Another, less important, trait of the exhibitionist is that his act, which always has the character of an acting out, has to happen in a public space and that it has to be characterized with a maximum of danger (p. 294). Why? Because the dangerous encounter with the Real needs a symbolic framework: the exhibitionist's desire is satisfied "only in so far as there are put into a certain relationship a certain manifestation of being and of the real in so far as it involves a symbolic framework as such" (p. 294). Here, once more, we draw the attention to the use of the perspective of the Real to describe the object *a*.

What the exhibitionist *shows*, i.e. his penis, is, on the other hand, redundant; according to Lacan it rather veils than unveils what it is about. The desire of the exhibitionist is "constituted by what [...] is glimpsed in the unnoticed, [...] trousers which [are] opened and closed, [...] what we can call the split (*fente*) in the desire" (1958, p. 294).

And what it is about for the exhibitionist, is “a question of making good” (Lacan, 1958, p. 295), as Gallagher poorly translates the original “il s’agit de combler cette fente” (Lacan, 1958, French edition, p. 701), which we translate as: “it is about filling this slit” (or slot, split or rift – remember Freud speaks about a ‘rift’ in the ego).

Next, Lacan turns to voyeurism. Here too, he focuses on the split, which for the voyeur is equally indispensable in his phantasm as for the exhibitionist. Here, he finds it in the split through which the voyeur observes his victim/partner, the archetypal keyhole (p. 295).

Here as well, the possibility of complicity of the Other is essential for the *jouissance* – Lacan uses the word here, but still unthematized, as synonymous with desire – of the subject of perversion: the idea that the object lets itself be seen (1958, p. 295). In other words, in voyeurism as well, the Other partakes in the scenario.

Thus, Lacan claims that in both voyeurism and exhibitionism, the essence of the phantasm is to be seen in the subject reducing itself to this split, which he never calls the object *a*, but which is easily read as such, which we choose to interpret as such.

Lacan describes the subject in the voyeuristic/exhibitionistic phantasm as “indicated by the split, the *béance*, something that is in the real, a hole and a flash” (p. 298). In other words: this split is *real*, this object *a* is *real*.

“Hole”, he says, continuing the same train of thought, “that means open, open to the desire of the Other” (p. 298). Lacan claims here and elsewhere that it is this split – and thus the object *a* of the scopophilic – that provokes the desire of the Other. This idea of provoking – more precisely: of *causing* – the desire of the Other as central to the phantasm of the subject in perversion will be generalized in Seminar X (1962).

He adds that it is important to ask the question of the relationship of this split to the feminine sexual organs, which he qualifies as that “what is symbolically the most intolerable thing in our experience” (1958, p. 295). This equivalent of the object *a* in



scotophilic perversion is clearly linked with the uncanny scene at the base of fetishism, and the fetishistic object, as a witness to castration, as fore-runner of the object *a*. We slowly see the picture emerge of the subject, confronted with the object *a*, helpless in front of the enigmatic desire of the Other.

Lacan describes exhibitionism and voyeurism, in accordance with the matheme of the phantasm, from two sides: from the side of the \$ and from the side of the *a*. From the side of the \$, it is a trap for the desire of the Other. From the side of the object *a*, the object of desire of the scotophilic is the split – at least, we interpret it as such.

However, Lacan describes the desire of the Other also as the object *a* of the scotophilic (1958, p. 297; cf. also pp. 340-341, where the desire of the Other is described as the object *a* for the subject in general).

The *a* as directly equal to the desire of the Other clearly leads to contradictions that witness the immaturity of Lacan's view of desire, the object *a*, jouissance and the Other at this point in his oeuvre. However, the fact that there is a link between the desire of the pervert, the object *a* and the desire of the Other, is, as said, crucial. Later in Lacan's work, these terms will find their proper structural place in relation to each other.

### *Realization of the phantasm*

What happens when the phantasm realizes? Or, to formulate it differently – and it is probably this that Lacan aims at when he calls the object *a* the desire of the Other – what happens when the subject is confronted with the desire of the Other? Lacan answers: aphanasis, the fading, the disappearing of the subject (1958, p. 299). In other words: the realization of the phantasm is possible in itself, but impossible *for the subject*, because the subject disappears in the act. In Seminar VII (1959), Lacan will answer: jouissance; in other words: when confronted with the object *a*, the result is jouissance, but it is not the subject that enjoys, for it fades in the realization of the phantasm. Or, to put it

alternatively, when the lack disappears, the subject that is constituted by that lack, disappears as well.

Lacan states explicitly: the aphanasis in front of the desire of the Other, goes for all subject structures, it is even the locus where the subject structure is decided:

It is this relationship of the desire of the subject, in so far as it has to situate itself before the desire of the other which nevertheless literally sucks him in, and leaves him without recourse [...] that there is constituted an essential structure, not only of neurosis, but of every other structure defined analytically (p. 300).

Towards the end of the Seminar, Lacan starts to speak of the relationship to the Other as determinant for the subject structure – more precisely, of the relationship that Freud calls ‘helplessness’ or *Hilflosigkeit* of the subject confronted with the desire of the Other – and thus also as determinant for perversion.

However, it is clear that perversion is more intimately linked to the passage à l’acte, to the fading of the subject and to what Lacan called ‘the atypical situation’ (see above) than neurosis is, even if Lacan claims that in neurosis, it is also a possibility – remember the ‘craziness’ of Hamlet. Moreover, it is the study of perversion, and more precisely of the *passage à l’acte* of the subject in perversion that *reveals* the fact that the phantasm is structured as such (p.300) – remember also that Lacan claims Freud discovered the phantasm through perversion.

This reformulation of the phantasm as a way of dealing with the *Hilflosigkeit* confronted with the desire of the Other lets Lacan formulate the function of the object *a* as protection or defense.

Lacan says, revisiting the idea of distance to the object from the object relation theorists, that one strives to keep one’s distance to the object of the phantasm, to the *a*, in order not to get confronted with the desire of the Other. Here (1958, p. 300), Lacan analyzes what happens in neurosis, subdivided in three structural solutions: phobia, hysteria and obsessional neurosis

In phobia, for which he refers to little Hans, Lacan formulates this ‘solution’ in terms of *distance* to jouissance – remark the use of the term jouissance instead of the term object *a*. The phobic object is the object of interdiction of a dangerous jouissance, because it opens “the abyss of desire as such” (p. 300).

Remarkably, and contrary to what Lacan announced, for the characterization of the hysteric and obsessional solution, he does not use the idea of a specific relationship to the object *a*. He describes these solutions as a matter of the subject sustaining his desire in front of the desire of the Other, unsatisfied in hysteria, impossible in obsessional neurosis.

So, only the phobic solution is described in terms of the distance to the object *a*, and, interestingly, in terms of a dangerous jouissance. As we saw before, phobia is close to fetishism: it were the phobic and the fetishistic objects that put Lacan on the track of the three forms of lack he described in Seminar IV (1956). However, here in the description of phobia, but also more generally throughout the Seminar, it remains unclear if the *a* is what keeps the distance, or what one has to keep away from – just like it remains unclear if the *a* is the aim or, as it will become later, the cause of desire. This difficulty will later lead Lacan to look for topological representations of the object *a* and connected concepts.

### *Masochist jouissance in ‘A child is being beaten’*

This vacillation between object *a* aim or cause of desire is also visible in the background when Lacan (1958, p. 306 ff.) returns, once more, to the phantasm of “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919e), which he calls unequivocally the phantasm of the obsessional. He explains that this phantasm is used for masturbation, for ‘masturbatory jouissance’. But Lacan says that “the masturbatory jouissance is here not the solution to desire, it crushes it” (1958, p. 306) – which foreshadows the idea that jouissance is *beyond* desire, that, in order to desire, one has to keep the object *a* at a distance.

Analyzing this phantasm, Lacan asks why in the second stage of the phantasm (see above), the subject substitutes itself for the rival sibling who undergoes the beating. Lacan sees this 'transfer', this metaphor, as 'the final enigma', and, referring to Freud, as masochism:

Do we not find ourselves here before the final enigma – and Freud also does not hide it – of what comes to be inscribed in the analytic dialectic as masochism, and whose predicament one sees after all presented here in a pure form. Namely that something in the subject perpetuates the happiness of the initial situation in a hidden, latent, unconscious situation of unhappiness (p. 308).

This is not the interpretation Lacan will give of masochism in Seminar X (1962). There, the happiness will have disappeared. Nonetheless, his interpretation is rich.

Firstly, he points out in this second time of the phantasm, where the subject substitutes itself for the other as victim, the ambiguity of the subject towards the act of the father (i.e. the beating), which comprises both humiliation and recognition. Lacan sees as the crux of the situation "the decisive step in [his] *jouissance* in so far as it culminates in the phantastical instant" (1958, p. 308). He describes this instant as the instant at which the subject is more '*on*' – the French indeterminate subject that can be translated as 'one', which we find in the title of certain French translations of Freud's text ("On bat un enfant") – than that he is *himself*.

We once more remark that in Freud's original text, there is no equivalent of the French '*on*' that Lacan uses and elaborates on; Freud writes 'Ein Kind wird geschlagen'; 'A child is being beaten' is a good translation. The indefinite article 'a' from 'a child' puts the accent on the depersonalization Lacan wants to catch under the '*on*'; but the original German is richer, as is the correct English translation: in both, the passive form – '*wird geschlagen*', 'is *being* beaten' – connotes the idea of depersonalization. The original text allows better to see what it is about: the subject is taking the object-pole in the phantasm.

In his further analysis of the phantasm, Lacan stresses the role of 'instrument of alienation' of the subject, the fact that he is on the one hand the instance that beats (the

'on', which is absent in English and German), the instrument of its own annulation, that, which Lacan called "the law of the Schläge" in Seminar V (1957, a.o. p. 243), exemplified by the whip in the phantasm. On the other hand, the subject in the phantasm is also 'a child', a child without figure, without sexual determination, "a sort of extract from the object" (1958, p. 308).

It is precisely in this relationship in the phantasm that the instant of *jouissance* appears. It is reminiscent of Baudelaire's "L'Héautontimorouménos", where he says: "I am the knife and the wound".

Towards the end of the Seminar (1958, p. 326), once more trying to pinpoint the difference between neurosis and perversion, Lacan returns to masochism, because, being the 'most original' perversion, it illuminates this difference best. He states mainly that masochism is all too easily reduced to an organic tendency; in other words, that the formula "masochism comes from the death drive" is way too simple to do justice to the structure of the subject in masochism.

However, the death drive, Lacan concedes, can be thought of as some sort of asymptotic aim of masochism. He sees this asymptotic character in the fact that "masochistic *jouissance* cannot go beyond a certain limit of maltreatment" (1958, p. 326) – an idea that will come back in "Kant with Sade" (1966). Once more, the term *jouissance* pops up in an uncritical fashion. But more importantly, what one misses if one reduces masochism to the death drive, is the intersubjective aspect: the relationship of the subject in masochism to the Other (1958, p. 326).

While putting masochism as the 'most original' perversion to the fore, and accentuating that the relationship to the Other is crucial to its understanding, Lacan once more misses his aim, because he fails to qualify this relationship. As a result, the quality of the relationship of the subject with the Other cannot (yet) be used as a criterion to distinguish perversion from neurosis.

In the wake of this statement, Lacan analyzes a few more traits that he sees as constitutive for the masochistic relationship. Firstly, he speaks of:

[a] particular passivity that the subject experiences and enjoys, in representing his fate as being played out above his head between a certain number of people who are there around him, and literally without taking his presence into account, everything that is being prepared about his fate being discussed before him without him being in the least taken into account (1958, p. 326).

Secondly, he speaks about the discourse that is constitutive of the subject, which, in the masochistic phantasm “takes the subject as nothing” (p. 326).

In other words, in masochism, the subject is reduced to a passive position, to nothing, when confronted with the desire of the Other. We interpret this as follows: in reducing himself to nothing, he becomes an object, takes the place of the object pole of the phantasm  $a$ . This objectal position that the pervert takes in the phantasm will be, as said, of importance in our analysis of the Sadean phantasm.

Once again, Lacan foregoes the chance to devise a differentiating criterion, takes a step back and generalizes what he pinpointed in perversion, in such a way that it also holds for all subject structures: “this will allow us to see at the horizon the relationship that there can be between the death instinct considered as one of the most radical agencies, and this something in the discourse which gives this support without which we would in no way have access to it, this support of this non-being which is one of the original, constitutive, implicit dimensions at the very roots of all symbolization” (p. 327).

In other words, the object  $a$ , here described as ‘nothing’, as ‘non-being’, is constitutive for symbolization *in general*, but it is especially the *masochistic* phantasm that shows this clearly. This ‘nothing’ is equivalent to what Lacan calls ‘the cut’, the function of which he describes for the three structures; for the subject of perversion, as described above for the scopophilic, the cut is instantiated by the ‘split’. We come back to the cut in perversion after an analysis of a short paragraph, where Lacan mentions the sadist phantasm.

### *The sadist phantasm*

In the relationship to the pathetic, to the pain of existing, Lacan discerns one more trait of the perverse phantasm (1958, pp. 218-219). It is in this context that Lacan makes the link to the *sadist* phantasm:

It is obviously in the measure that the one who suffers injury in the sadistic phantasy is something which involves the subject in so far as he himself can be open to this injury that the sadistic phantasy subsists [...] one cannot but be surprised that it has been thought possible to elude it for a single instant by making of the sadistic tendency something which in any way could be referred to a pure and simple primitive aggression (1958, p. 219).

Here, Lacan clearly states, at first sight *against* Freud, that sadism is *not* 'simply' a drive, not simply 'primitive aggression', that it is, like masochism, something embedded in the relationship with the Other. On the other hand, he speaks of an element of possible reversal of position, which is a trait of the imaginary relationship to the other: it is only in so far as I am the other, and the other is me, only in so far as there is transitivity that there can be sadism. In other words: while stressing the importance of the relationship with the Other, Lacan also tries to think sadism in an imaginary way here, in terms of imaginary identification, an attempt that is doomed to fail.

### *The split as the object a for the pervert*

In the case of the pervert, extending his analysis of scopophilia to perversion in general, Lacan designates what he describes as "the fundamental relationship" of "the subject suppressing his being in the cut" (1958, p. 328), as the 'split', so dear to Freud in "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1940e [1938]). Unfortunately, this idea to see the 'cut' – which is precursory to the object *a* as real – in perversion as similar to Freud's 'split', leads Lacan back to an imaginary description of perversion.

Lacan says the notion of splitting – he also speaks of an ‘identification’ with the split – is essential for the perverse structure (1958, p. 329). This leads him, in an analysis of an article of Gillespie on fetishism, to describe a splitting of the ego at the bottom of perversion, which Gillespie describes as the female genital, ‘the split object par excellence’, of which Lacan asks: “cannot the phantasy of a split ego arise from an identification with this split genital?” (1958, p. 330).

This rather clumsy conclusion on perversion at the end of Seminar VI still is linked to the view of identification with the missing phallus as constitutive for perversion from Seminar IV (1956). We recall that this road of seeing the identification with the missing phallus – which can be read as the identification with the image of the other, the  $i(a)$  – as constitutive for perversion, is exactly what leads Lacan to numerous impasses. He will leave this road in Seminar VII (1959). However, here, at the end of Seminar VI (1957), he clearly turns to the idea once more:

For the pervert the circumstance, this fact which unites into one term by introducing this slight opening which permits a quite special identification to the other, which unites in one term the “he is” and “he has” [...] He is the phallus, qua object within the mother, and he has it in his object of desire (1957, p. 332).

This leads Lacan to describe the terrifying desire of the mother as central, as ‘at the heart’ for the pervert, as the origin of the pervert’s identification with the imaginary phallus (1958, p. 333). Here, Lacan clearly does not heed his own warning: that perversion should be thought synchronously, not diachronically.

However, it is of main importance for Lacan’s future characterization of the perverse structure that he sees the subject in it as ‘suppressing his being in the cut’, i.e. as being in the place of the object  $a$ . This is, next to the first steps in the elaboration of the object  $a$  as real, what we see as the major contribution from Seminar VI (1954) to Lacan’s future theory of perversion. As Miller puts it: “the cut will be at bottom the last word of this Seminar” (Miller, 2013, p. 9).



## Other links to Seminar VII

Outside of the main argument of Seminar VI (1958), there are to be found some interesting topics that point towards important developments in Seminar VII (1959). In preparation of our discussion of Seminar VII (1959), we briefly mention two of them.

The first theme that will be of importance concerning perversion is the relationship of the subject in perversion to the Law, is only indicated here and there in dotted lines.

Analyzing a dream of Anna Freud (Lacan, 1958, p. 41 ff.), Lacan claims that the truth of desire – i.e. the fact that it is in essence perverse – is in itself an offense to the law, which is the reason why desire is repressed. This repression that makes desire unsayable, results in the fact that the subject is always effaced, that it always disappears in the enunciation. How does the subject sustain himself in regard to this effacement of his desire? On the one hand, it is the phantasm that permits the subject to sustain the veil that permits him to continue to be a speaking subject. On the other hand, it is obedience to the Law that gives the neurotic subject the moral pretext not to have to confront his desire. Foreshadowing an important formula of Seminar VII (1959), Lacan says that our desire is our duty (1958, p. 264; p. 274).

Speaking about the phallus, Lacan differentiates between the phallus as organ – the real phallus – and the phallus as signifying – the symbolic phallus. The real phallus is an instrument of jouissance, not integrated in the mechanism of desire, while the symbolic phallus is an element in cultural relations. Lacan links the symbolic phallus to the myth of the primordial murder of the father, the father as bearer of the absolute phallus. The symbolic phallus is thus linked to the Law (1958, p. 303).

In other words, it is the Law that regulates jouissance – better: that keeps jouissance at bay – by sustaining desire. Moreover, it is the father who links desire to the law. This permits us to understand that Lacan sees the distinction between desire and demand “in the fact that desire is a demand submitted to the law” (1958, p. 304).

A second, albeit minor, key to understanding Seminar VII (1959) and especially “Kant with Sade” (1966), is given when Lacan mentions what the logical operator ‘v’, the truth-functional operator of inclusive disjunction. The sign comes from the Latin conjunction ‘vel’, meaning ‘or’ in the sense of either one, the other or both, in contrast to ‘aut’, the exclusive disjunction, meaning either one or the other, but not both. He uses it in the context of the possible positions of the subject in front of the approach of the desire of the Other, where the question is whether ‘to be’ the phallus – and not to have it – or ‘not to be’ the phallus – in order to ‘have’ it: “If you will allow me to use here what is called a logical sign which is the v, which is used to designate the either-or of the distinction, the subject sees opening out before him the not to be – not to be the phallus – or if he is it, not to have it, namely to be the phallus” (1958, p 304).

Remark that Lacan uses the vel erroneously here. He uses it as if it were the operator of exclusive distinction. Remark also, more importantly, that Lacan puts his finger here on a possible distinctive criterion between perversion and neurosis without withholding it. This is very similar to Seminar IV (1956), where the subject had two possibilities: to identify with the phallus – the fetishist solution of ‘being’ the phallus for the (m)Other – or to accept castration and to ‘have’ a phallus, albeit one that inscribes itself into the Law. In terms of the object *a*, one could read this as follows: the subject in perversion is in the position of the object *a* in the phantasm, while the neurotic is in the position of the split subject – a thought Lacan comes close to more than once in the course of the Seminar, but one that does not stop his search for a distinctive criterion.

## Conclusion

Under the first heading on Seminar VI (1958), we traced Lacan’s articulation of desire with the phantasm and the object *a*.

In the beginning of the Seminar, he analyzes the object *a* as imaginary, as based on the image of the other (*i(a)*). We drew particular attention to the parallel with Lacan’s analysis of the fetish-object in Seminar IV (1956).

A bit further in the Seminar, Lacan starts to introduce more and more often symbolic elements in his attempts to analyze the object *a*. Witness to this are the use of the signifier, the scenario, the chain and the symbolic phallus as key concepts in his elaboration. His attempts culminate temporarily into a formula, defining the object of desire as ‘the signifier of its recognition’, and into the idea that in desire, it is about a relationship between the helpless subject and an enigmatic Other.

As shown, some of Lacan’s attempts to describe the object *a* go further, and include references to the Real. One of the most interesting moments in these attempts is to be found in his analysis of the object *a* as being the result of a cut. The object *a* is thought as a remainder, as a pound of flesh, drawn from the body, but also as the interval in the chain of signifiers. It is the ransom the subject pays when confronted with the lack in the Other, with the fact that there is no Other of the Other. It is Lacan’s way to generalize and to abstract the fetishistic object and the partial objects, including the phallus.

Under the second heading, we study the link with perversion. We show how without object *a*, perversion is unthinkable, and vice versa. We focus on Lacan’s attempts to come up with a structural distinctive criterion between perversion and neurosis. These attempts fail – fruitfully, once more.

Lacan shows how Freud’s discovery of perversion – or at least of the infantile polymorphously perverse tendencies – led to his discovery of the phantasm. Lacan refers to Freud’s account of fetishism, where one finds ‘a sequence, cut off from the development of the drama’ – which seems to lead Lacan to see perversion as structured symbolically and thus prone to psychoanalysis. However, Lacan sees the accent in the perverse phantasm lying on the *a*, not on the \$, which will be of crucial importance later.

In passing by, Lacan enumerates some traits proper to perversion: a ridiculous, comic aspect to the phantasm – seen from the neurotic perspective, and the fact that the phantasm of the pervert is spatial – the only properly *structural* determination he makes about perversion.

In his analysis of scotophilia, Lacan pictures the Other as a partner in the perverse phantasm, and speaks of the object *a* as a *trap* for desire, as that what provokes the

desire of the Other. At another moment, he speaks of the desire of the Other as being the object *a* as such, and also of the subject in perversion as making up for the lack in the Other, a crucial element in his later theories of perversion. He characterizes the object *a* for the scopophilic as the *split*, and sees it as *real*.

When Lacan considers the realization of the phantasm, he sees it as a confrontation with the desire of the Other. The result is the fading of the subject: the kernel of the phantasm is the disappearance of the split, and without a split, without lack, there is no subject. What stays is, as will become clear in Seminar VII (1959), desubjectified jouissance.

While these points of view are crucial for Lacan's later development, they also lead to impasses and paradoxes. As such, it is not clear if the object *a* is what enables the subject to cover his lack, to keep his distance from the desire of the Other, or if it is, on the contrary, that what the subject has to keep at distance. In the same sense, it is not clear – and this will only become clear in Seminar X (1962) if the object *a* is the *aim* or the *cause* of desire.

Other interesting ideas surface when Lacan speaks about masochism, which he acknowledges – just like Freud – to be 'the final enigma'. Once more he analyses Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919e). This time, he puts the accent on the jouissance of the subject that lies in the desubjectivation, in the subject taking the object position, the position of being reduced to nothing in the phantasm.

The cut as object *a*, and as joint between the Symbolic and the Real, seems to offer a possibility for an interesting analysis of perversion. Lacan forgoes this opportunity, and opts instead to read the cut in perversion as a split, in the sense of Freud's 'split ego' – which leads Lacan almost at the very end of the Seminar once more to a description of perversion from an imaginary angle – based on the idea of the female sex as a cut.

In Seminar VII (1959), which we will turn to now, the object *a* as real – in the guise of the Thing – will be the key concept around which much of these loose strands take their coherence.

## PART 5

### Lacan on sadism and masochism in Seminar VII: the deadly Thing

## Introduction

Before analyzing what Lacan has to say about masochism and sadism in his seventh Seminar, “The Ethics of Psychoanalysis” (1959), we will situate the place of this Seminar in Lacan’s work and briefly lay out its main topics.

In the sixth Seminar, “Desire and its interpretation” (1958), a turning point in Lacan’s views on desire, the phantasm and the desired, phantasmal object, Lacan firstly focuses on the lack that supports desire, but goes beyond. He explains the desired, phantasmal object as an instantiation of this lack, which he situates first in an element from the imaginary register, the alienating image of the other, then in the symbolic register as an empty signifier that is lacking in the Other, hence the idea that “there is no Other of the Other”. Towards the end of that Seminar, the character of the phantasmal object is further questioned: Lacan comes to see it as a rest, a remainder that escapes the imaginary and symbolic registers and will henceforth be thought of as a real object. An object that supports the openness of the imaginary and the symbolic registers, an object, in other words, that leaves a hole in both registers, that prevents them from closing in on themselves. It is this object that Lacan calls the object *a*, the object that in its phantasmal relation with the split subject supports this helpless subject’s desire in his confrontation with the enigmatic desire of the Other.

To understand Seminar VII (1959), it is necessary to read it in the prolongation of the former Seminar. Lacan’s shifts his attention here from the nature of desire to the nature of the object of desire. Is the object of our desire also that what brings us pleasure? His answer is a resounding ‘no!’ – it brings *jouissance*, beyond pleasure. The ensuing question: “Should we nevertheless pursue it?” leads to an examination of ethics at large and the ethics of psychoanalysis in particular. Both these questions, which assume many different forms and shapes, subtend the whole of the Seminar on ethics.

Lacan firstly expands on his view on the 'ethics of pleasure'. According to Lacan, this 'morality of happiness' dominated the field of thinking about ethics unto the arrival of the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham. Lacan subsumes both tendencies however under one heading: that of ethics striving to achieve a 'supreme good'.

Reading Freud's "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1950a), Lacan will claim Freud is the first thinker who puts a question mark next to this way of organizing an ethic. Taking the idea of pleasure really serious, Freud shows its polymorphous perverse nature. According to him, human desire is not based on any ontological good, nor is it good in itself: it is barely a pursuit of pleasure for its own sake and *thus* perverse.

But Lacan digs deeper in Freud's early text, and ventures beyond the idea of the perverse essence of pleasure. It is in his close-reading of the "Project" (Freud, 1950a) that Lacan forges the concept of the 'Thing', which translates 'das Ding' from Freud's original German text. It will be the central concept of Seminar VII (1959). As the Thing will be Lacan's way to name the object *a* as real, and because the object *a* as real is crucial to comprehend how Lacan will think the sadist and masochist phantasm, we devote quite some time to Lacan's close-reading of Freud's "Project" (1950a).

Lacan's reinterpretation and enlargement of the Thing is clearly linked to two things. Firstly, to his concept of the Real as that which is opposed to the Imaginary and which is impossible to symbolize. Secondly, to his object relations theory: it is a new figure of the always-already lost object that took, as lack, center stage in his fourth Seminar (1956). The difference with Lacan's former work is that here, the lost object appears not as object of pleasure, but as object of *too much pleasure*, and, thus, *pain*. The link with Freud is clear: as we showed in the section on Freud and masochism/sadism, the death drive is what he came upon when he took the idea of 'pleasure in pain' *really* serious.

Notwithstanding its direct source in Freud's Project (1950a), Lacan's Thing cannot be thought without reference to Kant's transcendental aesthetics in his "Critique of Pure Reason" (1781). In his first Critique, Kant mints the homonymous concept that clearly



influenced Lacan, even if Lacan does not pay direct tribute to this influence. Lacan, however, does deal extensively with Kant's ethics as laid down in his second critique, the "Critique of Practical Reason" (1788). Lacan comes up with an entire novel interpretation, which focuses on the unmasking of Kant's ethical system, hinged on the absoluteness and universality of the moral obligation one hears from one's 'voice of consciousness'.

It is here, in the idea of obeying a command devoid of pathos, linked to the superego, that Lacan situates *jouissance* as the beyond of pleasure, the second concept of major importance that takes form in Seminar VII (1959).

*Jouissance* is Lacan's guide in his reading of Sade's 'Philosophy of the bedroom', which he says goes further, is more consequent than Kant, because it enables Lacan to rethink what Kant calls the voice of consciousness as something that is foreign to the subject, as something in the prolongation of Freud's death drive. It is in this context that Lacan attempts to construct an ethics that is centered not on universal rules, but on the subject's stance in relation to its singular enjoyment.

The most interesting thoughts of Lacan that will allow him later to develop a stable theory on sadism and on masochism are to be found in this part of the Seminar. These ideas are further elaborated and expanded in "Kant with Sade", a text from the "Ecrits" (1966) that Lacan writes three years after the Seminar on ethics and on which we will focus in the next section.

The rest of the Seminar, of less importance to our argument, deals with the problems faced by an ethics of the singular. Lacan tries to think how this singularity can be introduced in society, which leads to a reconceptualization of sublimation. For Lacan, sublimation is structurally linked to the esthetic, and, as such, to the Imaginary. But, to say the least, the attempt to think an ethics in terms of esthetics, in terms of the Imaginary, leads Lacan to a problematic position. He illustrates this position and its aporias through a very original interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. It is no wonder then that the concluding chapter, where Lacan tries to ground an ethics of psychoanalysis,

only leads to more problems and questions – in our opinion, one of the main reasons why so many commentators of this Seminar contradict each other and often themselves.<sup>171</sup>

In the introductory chapter, Lacan states the hope that “to deepen our understanding of the economic role of masochism” is “the point with which we will conclude this year” (Lacan, 1959, p. 15).

Nonetheless, during the course of the Seminar, Lacan rarely deals directly with sadism or masochism. Sadism is mentioned a bare five times, masochism only appears in three passages. Seminar VII (1959) does certainly not result in a complete theory of masochism and sadism. However, the text is crucial for an understanding of the elaboration of Lacan’s take on these perversions. Firstly, because it is on the basis of what Lacan finds in the Seminar on ethics that he writes “Kant with Sade” (1966). It is there that Lacan focuses on the sadist phantasm and will propose that the pervert strives to take the place of the object *a* in order to guarantee the Other’s *jouissance*. Secondly, because the concepts of the ‘Thing’ and ‘*jouissance*’ precede Lacan’s future development of the object *a*, on which Lacan bases himself in “Anxiety” (1962) to deal more extensively and in a more satisfactory way with sadism and masochism.

In other words, Seminar VII (1959) is an obligatory detour to come to a better understanding of perversion.

Because of this, while reading closely the relevant passages in Seminar VII (1959), we will try to come to a proper understanding of the concepts of the Thing and *jouissance* and their implications for thinking sadism and masochism. We will likewise pay close attention to what Lacan says already in this Seminar about Kant and Sade. In this way, we will be properly equipped to deal with the very dense and difficult “Kant with Sade” (1966), which we analyze in the next section.

### Points of reference for the introduction of the Thing

Before dealing with the Thing, we will study the places in Seminar VII (1959) where he touches upon sadism or masochism *before* he introduces the Thing. These

developments or references are always slightly outside of Lacan's main line of thought. But they provide us with some reference points and a context that enables us to firstly understand Lacan's elaboration of the concept of the Thing and secondly to apply this idea to sadism and masochism.

### Desire is polymorphously perverse and incestuous

In the introduction of the first chapter of the Seminar (1958, pp. 22-23), Lacan inaugurates the question of an ethic with the idea of a fault, of transgression, of guilt, and links it to Freud's death drive. According to Lacan, Freud sees the genesis of the moral dimension as rooted in desire itself; in desire for transgression, that is to say, on the most base level, in incestuous, polymorphously perverse desire. The idea is that it is precisely prohibition that awakens desire, not the other way around. It is in the transgressions of prohibition that one can situate what Lacan calls here "perverse jouissance" (1958, p.12). In other words, from the beginning of the Seminar, Lacan stresses the importance of the relationship between perverse jouissance – note that jouissance is here still used in its everyday sense, not yet as a full-fledged concept –, the law and the transgression of the law.

Also in the very beginning of the Seminar, Lacan clearly identifies his adversaries: he wants to reverse the tendency of psychoanalysis to forget that the origin of desire resides in the polymorphously perverse forms of infantile desire, which results in the moralizing tendency that wants to 'tame' the analysand's 'perverse desire' by 'harmonizing' his drives by subsuming them under the genital drive and unifying them into marital sex (1958, pp. 8-10).

It is necessary to bind the two formulations: polymorphous perverse desire becomes *prohibited* after the Oedipus, and only as such, afterwardly, does it become *incestuous*.

It is important to keep this basic axiom in mind, which, as simple as it might sound, is a basic vector to the understanding of the whole Seminar: desire is in essence polymorphously perverse and incestuous.

### The Other makes the law

In a brief analysis of eighteenth-century moral experiments, Lacan links the concepts of the law and the Other. He notes that the libertines' attempt to 'liberate' desire from societal prohibitions – from the law – was doomed to fail. He sees libertine theory and experience as challenging the law as ultimately demanding a submission to the Other as judge or God – and thus to the law (1958, p. 4).

He who submits himself to challenge the law, finds at the end its premises, namely, the Other to whom this challenge is addressed, in the last analysis its judge and its lawmaker. The idea of the Other as judge and lawmaker provides us with another coordinate to pave the way for our understanding of the Thing.

### The subject derives jouissance from the cruelty of the superego

In a psychoanalytic context, one cannot talk about law and transgression without mentioning the superego. In passing by, Lacan says about the superego that it is “the obscene and ferocious figure in which the moral agency appears when we seek it at its root” (1958, p. 7).

But what should the subject do, confronted with this cruel superego?

Will it or will it not submit itself to the duty that it feels within like a stranger, beyond, at another level? Should it or should it not submit itself to the half-unconscious, paradoxical, and morbid command of the superego, whose jurisdiction is moreover revealed increasingly as the analytical exploration goes forward and the patient sees that he is committed to its path? If I may put it thus, isn't its true duty to oppose that command? (1959, p. 7).

Lacan does not provide any easy answer. Instead, he puts new light on Freud's paradox of good consciousness, the paradox of the one who, the more scrupulously he obeys the moral law, is tortured all the more by guilt. When one is bound to the law in an excessive way, we see *jouissance* appear, which is reminiscent of Freud's idea of moral masochism. The kind of pleasure in unpleasure that is derived from this bind is what Lacan calls here *jouissance*: it seems to have penetrated into the very fidelity to the law. *Jouissance*, then, seems to be the hidden motive behind the obscene and ferocious superego. But it is only later in the Seminar that Lacan will mint the term *jouissance* as a concept.

Important to our argument is the stress laid in the introduction of this Seminar on the proximity of the desires, their polymorphous-perverse origins, the drives, prohibition, ethics, the law and the 'cruel' superego. We see the nascent link between the superego and *jouissance* as the third point of reference.

### Obeying the law brings pain to the subject and *jouissance* to the Other

But what to do with the paradox? Should one boundlessly pursue *jouissance*? Lacan comes back on the question in the last chapter of the Seminar, but, to our understanding, never really shows his cards.

Instead of resolving the paradox, Lacan adds two ideas. Firstly, the idea that fidelity to the law brings enjoyment, but not to the subject: it is the enjoyment of the Other. Secondly, that the experience of the obeying subject is one of pain.<sup>172</sup> This provides us with one more reference point concerning the Thing, and with one more link with masochism.

### The Real is actualized through the law

For once, Lacan is from the introduction to the Seminar onwards really clear and concise about what he is dealing with, and what his main thesis is:

what I wish to cover this year [...] extends from the recognition of the omnipresence of the moral imperative, of its infiltration into all our experience, to the other pole, that is to say, the pleasure in a second degree we may paradoxically find there, namely, moral masochism [...] my thesis is that the moral law, the moral command, the presence of the moral agency in our activity, insofar as it is structured by the symbolic, is that through which the real is actualized – the real as such, the weight of the real (1958, p. 20).

Two things are of importance in this quote: the conception of a different pleasure brought by moral masochism – pleasure in a second degree, excessive pleasure, *jouissance* – and the idea of the Real that is at work in the law, presentifying itself in our symbolic activity. This second idea will force Lacan to revisit his former conceptualization of the Real, and gives us one more reference point towards an understanding of the Thing.

Lacan's term *moral* masochism comes, of course, from Freud (see our part on Freud and masochism/sadism), who distinguishes it from feminine masochism, and sees both varieties as stemming from a primary masochism. As we noted earlier, Freud does not, at least not in a clear and convincing way, differentiate between a neurotic and a perverse kind of masochism. Translating moral masochism as neurotic masochism and feminine masochism as perverse masochism is, unfortunately, a gross simplification. Of course, the guilt linked by Freud to masochism plays an important role in obsessional neurosis. But that doesn't imply that the relationship of the subject to the law and the superego is of no importance to perverse masochism. We propose to leave the question open for the moment, and to follow Lacan's reasoning around the Thing, *jouissance* and the law – and implicitly around masochism – without asking at each turn of the road: "Is it neurotic or perverse"? The main reason for this is, that, if we follow Lacan on this road, his reasoning clearly crystallizes into a theory of *perverse* masochism.

However, as noted higher, such a theory is not yet possible for Lacan at the time of Seminar VII (1959). This only becomes possible with his re-elaboration of the object *a* as the object-cause-of-desire in Seminar X (1962), because it is precisely a specific relationship of the subject to this object that will be characteristic for perversion, and will allow Lacan to differentiate perversion clearly from neurosis.

## Summary of reference points before the introduction of the Thing

We sum up the reference points identified above:

- 1 Drives are polymorphously perverse and incestuous.
- 2 He who goes against the law meets the big Other as origin of the law.
- 3 The cruel commands of the superego are linked to jouissance.
- 4 This jouissance is the jouissance of the big Other; the subject experiences pain.
- 5 The Real presentifies itself through the law.

These coordinates are all crucial to the understanding of Lacan's future positions on masochism and sadism. In the main sections of Seminar VII (1959), they are developed through and articulated with a new and unique concept, the concept of the 'Thing'.

### Introduction of the Thing

In the third, fourth and fifth lessons of the first part of Seminar VII (1959), titled by Miller, the editor, "Introduction of the Thing" (Lacan, 1959, pp. 24-84), Lacan finally introduces the concept that is driving the Seminar. As the Thing is Lacan's way of naming the object *a* as real, and because of the importance of the object *a* as real in the sadist and the masochist phantasm, we will study the introduction of this difficult concept in depth. We will look at it from different angles. Firstly, we will look at the linguistic context of the concept. Then, we will study how the concept finds its roots in Kant and Freud. Finally, we analyze what Lacan has to say about the Thing.

## Linguistic situation of the Thing

Lacan starts by a linguistic situation of the term. He notes the difference between the German words 'die Sache' and 'das Ding', which both can be translated by the English 'Thing' or the French 'Chose'. To avoid this confusion, we will write 'the Thing' with a capital 'T' when it translates 'das Ding'.

The pertinence of this linguistic precision is rooted in Freud's use of the concepts 'Sache' and 'Ding'. Lacan remarks how Freud uses 'Sache' in his distinction between 'Wortvorstellungen' (word-representations) and 'Sachvorstellungen' (thing-representations). Lacan attributes a strong position to Freud – a stronger position than Freud explicitly takes: he claims that for Freud 'things' (in the sense of Sache) are the result of *human action* and as such of *words*:

it is no accident if the Sachvorstellungen are linked to Wortvorstellungen, since it tells us that there is a relationship between thing and word. The straw of words only appears to us as straw insofar as we have separated it from the grain of things, and it was first the straw which bore that grain [...] it is obvious that the things of the human world are things in a universe structured by words, that language, symbolic processes, dominate and govern all [...] The Sache is clearly the thing, a product of industry and of human action as governed by language (1959, p. 45).

These precisions allow Lacan to point out that the Thing as 'Ding' is something entirely different than the thing as 'Sache', which he clearly sees as a product of the symbolic order. As noted above, the Thing partakes of the real.

But in order to follow how Freud uses the concept of Thing, we will take a look at the source which lies at the base of both Freud's and Lacan's use of the concept: Kant's 'Ding an sich'.



## Kant on das Ding

To understand where Kant's idea of a 'Ding an sich' comes from, it is interesting to keep in mind that it is grounded in a long tradition, starting with Aristotle's conceptual differentiation between the 'attributes' and the 'essence' of an object – whereby the essence is knowable. In the next citation, Kant defines the object as noumenal (das Ding an Sich) and its representations as phenomenal, opposed to the – mainly Aristotelian – tradition:

things as objects of our senses existing outside us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, i.e., the representations which they cause in us by affecting our senses (Kant, 2012, p. 40).

This is the most basic premise of Kant's philosophy. The Thing-in-itself is unknowable (it belongs to the 'noumenal world'); we can only know the impressions it makes on us, 'causing' 'representations' in us, giving rise to our 'phenomenal world'). Lacan, interestingly, uses Kant's term 'causa noumenon' – i.e. the noumenal as cause – to understand 'das Ding' as some kind of 'cause': "Das Ding presents itself at the level of unconscious experience as that which already makes the law" (1959, p. 73). This points forwards to what Lacan will say In Seminar X (1962) about the object *a* as cause of desire.

## Freud on 'das Ding'

For Freud, contrary to Kant, the term 'Ding' is not a major concept; he only uses it sparsely. The main occurrences to which Lacan repeatedly points are to be found in "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (Freud, 1950a), and are 'reinterpreted' to form the basis for Lacan's development of the concept.

As a build-up towards Lacan's vision on the Thing, we focus here on Freud's 'Ding', both in his "Project" (1950a) and in Lacan's re-reading of it.

Firstly, we define what the Thing means to Freud; secondly we focus on what Lacan has to say on Freud's reality principle, which is, for Lacan, closely linked to the Thing. The reason for this is that in Freud's elaboration of the reality principle, Lacan finds some key concepts, which lead him to the development of his view on the Thing. These concepts are the 'Nebenmensch' or 'Neighbor', the 'Not des Lebens' (a concept that translates difficultly; literally it means the 'need of life'), the difference between words and things, and, last but not least, the lost object.

### *Definition*

The central idea of what Freud calls the Thing, is the same as Kant's: there is a difference between what we know and what we don't know about the object. For Kant, the difference between the unknown (the noumenal 'Ding') and the known (the representations, the phenomena caused by it) is absolute. But for Freud, it is not. Freud sees it more in terms of the difference between what is already known and what is not yet known. In that sense, the object, which Freud calls in this context the perception complex, falls apart in two parts: one part (already known) that can be understood by memory (because it has attributes we recognize) and one "that is imposing by its fixed structure", "that stays together as a thing" (Freud, 1950a, p. 331), and is more reminiscent of what the Aristotelian tradition calls substance.

To illustrate his vision of the Thing, Freud proposes an unsettling example, which Lacan comments on (and deforms) extensively:

Let us suppose that the object which furnishes the perception resembles the subject—a fellow human-being. If so, the theoretical interest [taken in it] is also explained by the fact that an object like this was simultaneously the [subject's] first satisfying object and further his first hostile object, as well as his sole helping power. For this reason it is in relation to a fellow human-being that a human-being learns to cognize. Then the perceptual complexes proceeding from this fellow human-being will in part be new and non-comparable—his features, for instance, in the visual sphere; but other visual perceptions—e.g., those of the movements of his hands—will coincide in the subject with memories of quite similar visual

impressions of his own, of his own body, [memories] which are associated with memories of movements experienced by himself. Other perceptions of the object too—if, for instance, he screams—will awaken the memory of his [the subject's] own screaming and at the same time of his own experience of pain. Thus the complex of the fellow human-being falls apart into two components, of which one makes an impression by its constant structure and stays together as a thing, while the other can be understood by the activity of memory—that is, can be traced back to information from [the subject's] own body (Freud, 1950a, p. 331).

Freud, when he gives an example of a Thing, does not take just an everyday 'random' perception complex as the example of his Thing. Instead of the banal table so often taken by philosophers as model for an object, Freud chooses the '*Nebenmensch*' (literally the fellow man, translated as 'neighbor') as paradigmatic. Moreover, he picks not just any *Nebenmensch*; he chooses precisely the mother of the subject. The mother, whom Lacan calls the first Other, which Freud puts on the level of the Thing, is said by him to be 'the first object of satisfaction'. In that sense, it is the 'lost object', and as such the object par excellence. Freud also calls it on the one hand 'the only power that can help' (i.e. to satisfy the drives), while on the other hand naming it also explicitly 'the first enemy object'. Remark that this is reminiscent of what we said about Seminar IV (1956), where Lacan characterizes the mother as real.

A few pages further, Freud adds: "What we call *things* are residues which evade being judged" (1950a, p. 334).

This Freudian identification of the 'Thing' as a 'residue' that 'escapes our judgement', comes close to what Kant called the Thing-in-itself, and, more importantly, to Lacan's concepts of the Real and of object *a* (certainly in its aspect of 'remainder'). We stress also that Freud speak about the Thing as a 'new' and 'non-comparable' perceptual complex. This makes one think of the Real as that which intrudes, that, against which the subject has no defense, that what escapes the Imaginary and the Symbolic. It will be Lacan's guide through his elaboration of the Thing.

### *The reality principle*

In order to substantiate the claim that – for Freud and for himself – the Thing as ‘Ding’ is something entirely different than the thing as ‘Sache’, Lacan stresses that Freud links the Thing to the reality principle (Lacan, 1959, pp. 45-46). During a long and complex digression, turning mainly around Freud’s “Project” (1950a), Lacan isn’t ever totally clear on how exactly we have to understand the reality principle in order to make sense of the Thing. He does give some directions and some hints towards an interesting and detailed interpretation of Freud’s reality principle, which is unfortunately often more confusing than clarifying. An analysis of it will, however, bring us closer to an understanding of what Lacan means with the Thing and, even more importantly, of what he means with the Real. Both these concepts will be instrumental in understanding his approach to sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962).

#### Freud on the reality principle

Freud’s development of the reality principle has a long history.<sup>173</sup> To begin with, while studying hysteria, Freud and Breuer come up with the idea of a principle of constancy which claims that the psychic apparatus tries to maintain an optimal level of energy: as constant as possible.

While projecting a scientific psychology in 1895 (1950a), Freud describes an even more fundamental principle, the principle of inertia, which claims that the neurons of the nervous system tend to rid themselves totally of all energy or excitation. This new principle doesn’t simply supplant the principle of constancy, but it assigns another role to it. For Freud, at the time of his “Project” (1950a), the principle of constancy becomes secondary; it only *modifies* the more basic principle of inertia, according to demands made by what he calls the ‘exigencies of life’ (Not des Lebens), which can only be answered by a ‘specific action’ (spezifische Aktion) from the organism, for which it needs to keep energy in store or ‘bound’.

In the seventh chapter of “The Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1900a), Freud describes the psychic apparatus as one whose activities are regulated by an effort to avoid an accumulation of excitation and to maintain itself so far as possible without excitation. On basis of this, he elaborates the pleasure principle as the successor of the principle of inertia.

The reality principle is only introduced in 1911, in “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” (1911b). It replaces the principle of constancy. The reality principle is shown to be genetically second to the pleasure principle. It is the former that amends the way of the pleasure principle – just like the principle of constancy did in respect to the principle of inertia. In its search for satisfaction, the reality principle does not take the most direct routes. It makes detours and postpones the attainment of its goal because it takes into account the conditions imposed by the outside world. No surprise that Freud describes the goal of his small article as bringing the psychological significance of the real external world into the structure of his theories.

In the article, he characterizes the pleasure principle as follows:

The governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognize; it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [Lust-Unlust] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure. (Here we have repression.) (Freud, 1911b, pp. 218-219).

The reality principle is sketched by Freud as follows:

It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable (Freud, 1911x, p. 219).

Freud holds this view till “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g).

In a footnote to the text, Freud gives the seizing example of a hungry child:

[it] probably hallucinates the fulfillment of its internal needs; it betrays its unpleasure, when there is an increase of stimulus and an absence of satisfaction, by the motor discharge of screaming and beating about with its arms and legs, and it then experiences the satisfaction it has hallucinated (Freud, 1911b, p. 219).

Here, the detour made by the reality principle passes, once more, through the *Other* – and, one should add, through *pain*. It is this ‘detour’ that Freud calls the ‘specific action’, necessary to meet the demands of ‘the exigencies of life’ (Not des Lebens) (1950a, p. 318).

While the standard interpretation of this ‘Not des Lebens’ is that it points at vital needs such as hunger and thirst, Lacan sees it differently. He refers to the ‘Not des Lebens’ as:

[...] a kind of pressure that [...] Freud calls not “the vital needs” – as is often said in order to emphasize the secondary process – but the Not des Lebens in the German text. An infinitely stronger phrase. Something that wishes. “Need” and not “needs.” Pressure, urgency. The state of Not is the state of emergency in life (1959, p. 46).

Later, Lacan will put this ‘Not’ on a par with the drives.

### Lacan on Freud’s reality principle

But what has Lacan to say about Freud’s reality principle? How does he use it to prepare the ground for the introduction of the Thing, and, often more indirectly, to speak about the Real?

Lacan points out the evolution of the pleasure principle in Freud’s work, and emphasizes that where it was at first opposed to the reality principle, it became later, at the time of “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920g), opposed to the death drive, which Lacan calls “that opaque surface which to some has seemed so obscure that it is the antinomy of all though”, and “this law beyond all law, that can only be posited as a final structure, as a vanishing point of any reality that might be attained” (1959, p. 21).

Lacan thus clearly links the reality principle to the death drive. But he leaves the reader wondering about the exact nature of this connection, which is, obviously, critical to the understanding of Lacan's take on the Thing and the Real. He points to "the problematic character of that which Freud posits under the term reality" (p. 21), but also, at first sight confusingly, to the link between ethics and the Real. He says: "Moral action is, in effect, grafted on to the real" (p. 21). This link, for the moment, stays obscure, but foreshadows the link Lacan develops later in the Seminar between the Thing and the Real.

A bit further in the text, Lacan characterizes the pleasure principle as the principle that tends toward deception and error, and the organism as one that "seems designed not to satisfy need, but to hallucinate such satisfaction" (p. 28).

This characterization of the pleasure principle as tending towards error, allows Lacan to present the reality principle, on the other hand, as a corrective mechanism. This is the 'classical' view of the reality principle. But Lacan goes further when he calls it "an apparatus that operates as an agency of reality; it presents itself essentially as a principle of correction, of a call to order" (p. 28).

Here, Lacan begins to show his cards: he clearly speaks of the principle as of an 'agency', that comes to 'correct' something', to 'call to order'. And the instance here which 'calls to order', which 'corrects', whose 'agent' is the reality principle, is, of course, the Real.

In the filigree of the text, we see Lacan starting to shift his focus concerning the dynamics of the relationship between subject and reality: in opposition to Freud, it seems the subject is the passive and reality the active partner.

Lacan's analysis continues with an examination of the dual make-up of the psyche according to Freud. Lacan sees it as having "a 'fundamentally conflictual character': a form of radical inadequation" (p. 28).

Lacan asks himself what Freud's real reason is for positing this conflictual character between pleasure and reality principles. At the bottom of this conflict, Lacan points to Freud's experience with neurotic symptoms: "For [Freud this opposition] corresponds rather to the most direct kind of lived experience, namely, that of the inertia which at the level of symptoms presented him with obstacles whose irreversible character he recognized" (p. 29).

Moreover, Lacan doesn't call Freud's experience (and thus also the psychoanalytic experience at large, and more precisely the experience on which the birth of psychoanalysis was based) only 'lived', but also "at bottom moral in kind" (p. 29) – another hint at the link between the reality principle and ethics.

In the same paragraph, Lacan also sees Freud make an advance towards discovering reality. He puts it like this: "It is here that one finds [Freud's] first advance in darkness toward that Wirklichkeit, which is the point to which his questioning returns; it is the key, the distinctive feature of his whole system" (p. 29).

This 'Wirklichkeit' (German for reality) stays opaque in Lacan's analysis. But the fact that he claims it is the key of his whole system, shows how important Freud's view on reality is to Lacan and his elaboration of the Real.

A bit further in the same chapter, Lacan describes Freud's task – i.e. the formulation of the reality principle – as follows:

to explain how the activity of review and restraint functions or, in other words, how the apparatus which supports the secondary processes avoids the occurrence of catastrophes that would inevitably follow the lapse of too much or too little time or the abandonment to its own devices of the pleasure principle. If the latter is released too soon, the movement will be triggered simply by a Wunschgedanke; it will necessarily be painful and will give rise to unpleasure. If on the other hand the secondary apparatus intervenes too late, if it doesn't give the little discharge required to attempt the beginning of an adequate solution through action, then there will be a regressive discharge, that is to say, an hallucination, which is also a source of displeasure (Lacan, 1959, p. 29).



In other words, the task of the reality principle, as described here, is the avoidance of the unpleasure, of the pain the pleasure principle brings when left to its own devices. We witness here a surprising encounter, which will be of importance to the development of our subject: the reality principle – and in its wake, the Real – meets with pain, even if it is in a negative way.

Another interesting, at first sight opaque, point that Lacan stresses, is the fact that Freud considers reality as something precarious: “From a Freudian point of view, the reality principle is presented as functioning in a way that is essentially precarious [...] Reality is precarious” (p. 30).

What does Lacan mean by “Reality is precarious”? It seems as if Freud’s main idea on reality is that the *organism* is precarious in its survival in harsh reality. But Lacan seems to be turning our whole conception of reality upside-down; to him, it is *reality* that is precarious.

How can we explain this? Unfortunately, at this point, Lacan doesn’t provide an answer. We can only conjecture that, since Lacan sees the reality principle as ‘an agency of reality’, and since the functioning of the reality principle as correcting mechanism for the pleasure principle is precarious – if it intervenes a little too early or a little too late, catastrophes would follow as shown above –, he seems to be making the same point as Freud. Save for the fact that Lacan indirectly stresses the idea that in the reality principle, the Real is at work.

Lacan does point also in another direction, which we illustrate with another quote: “[The approach to the real] can only begin to occur by means of a primary defense” (p. 30).

Here, Lacan links the Real to something that can only be approached by means of defenses. This is far from clear, but we link it to Freud’s idea of the double function of the senses of the organism: *defending* the organism against a too high charge of energy that comes from reality, and *sampling* this reality in order to gather information to guide a

specific action. In this sense, the Real can be seen as something the organism defends itself against.

In the continuation of his analysis of the reality principle, Lacan discusses the difference between 'thought' and 'words' for Freud. He points out that for Freud, the primary process tends towards an identity of perception. He adds: "It doesn't matter whether it is real or hallucinated, such an identity will always tend to be established. If it isn't lucky enough to coincide with reality, it will be hallucinated. The risk is in the possibility of the primary process winning out" (Lacan, 1959, p. 31).

The secondary process, on the other hand, Freud and Lacan both claim, tends towards an identity of thought (Lacan, 1959, p. 31).

Lacan and Freud both link the reality principle and the secondary process to articulated speech, and as such to words (and word-representations), the (pre-)conscious and perception. Things (and thing-representations) on the other hand, are linked to the unconscious. This is very far from the interpretation of the reality principle as some kind of automatic behavioral adaptive mechanism we referred to above:

The reality principle dominates that which, whether conscious or preconscious, is in any case present in the order of reasoned discourse, articulatable, accessible and emerging from the preconscious (Lacan, 1959, p. 48).

But according to Freud – and to Lacan – unconscious processes, thought-processes or *movements* of thought only become conscious as *words*. And there is more: these words only become conscious when they are *acoustically perceived as uttered speech*.

We remark in passing by that the simplest and most direct answer to the question "What is acoustically perceived as uttered speech"? is: a voice. In the case of thought, this voice is, obviously, internal. An internally heard voice is, as idea, very close to the idea of the superego as voice of consciousness. Recall from above that Lacan called it "the obscene and ferocious figure in which the moral agency appears when we seek it at its root"

(1959, p. 7). The voice is an important Lacanian concept, one of the objects *a* we will return to when discussing sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962).

When Lacan cites the example Freud uses in the “Project” (1950a) to illustrate this idea of acoustically perceived uttered speech, we encounter once more a carefully chosen example that seems far from typical: the cry that *causes* ‘an unpleasant object’:

For example, without the cry that it elicits, we would only have the most confused notion of an unpleasant object, a notion that would indeed fail to detach it from the context of which it would simply be the evil center, the object would instead be stripped of the particularity of its context. Freud tells us that a hostile object is only acknowledged at the level of consciousness when pain causes the subject to utter a cry. The existence of the feindlicher Objekt as such is the cry of the subject (Lacan, 1959, p. 32).

With this quote, Lacan seems to, finally, reveal his hand. He clearly achieves his purpose here: to prepare the reader for the Thing and the subject’s relation to it.

Firstly, he speaks about the Thing when he talks of an ‘unpleasant’ or bad object, undifferentiated, stripped from its context and thus from all particularity. The Thing is, in other words, unpleasantness or evil in itself, *evil an sich*. This is exactly what he described earlier as Freud’s view of das Ding: an attribute-less substance.

Of course, this description of a substance without attributes is closely related to Lacan’s descriptions of the Real around 1953-1955, when the concept starts to gain importance in his work. Lacan says among others: “there is no absence in the Real” (1954, p. 313), the Real “is always in its place” (1966, p. 25). While the Symbolic, on the contrary, consists out of a set of signifiers, and is characterized by difference, opposition, discreteness and thus by the possibility of absence. The Real is undifferentiated: it is “absolutely without fissure” (1954, p. 97), as Lacan says in a formulation that comes especially close to the idea of an attribute-less substance. It is the signifier that introduces a ‘cut’ in the Real: “the world of words [...] creates the world of things – things originally confused in the hic et nunc of the all in the process of coming-into-being” (1959, p. 65).

Secondly, Lacan goes further than his earlier view on the Real when he speaks about the relationship between the subject and the Thing in the context of his discussion on how evil enters consciousness: through *pain*. And what does this pain do? It makes the subject utter a *cry*, the matrix of any articulated speech, the primordial signifier. Lacan makes here, even more clearly than above, the link between reality and speech. In Lacanese: between the Real (and thus the Thing) and the Symbolic.

As an aside, we remark that this connection between the Real and the Symbolic is a strong argument against the interpretation of the Thing as the sign of a radical change of positions between the 'early' and the 'late Lacan'. As De Kesel puts it: "It is not then a matter of seeing in das Ding an alternative to the 'primacy of the signifier' or, to put it differently, to see a break between 'the Lacan of das Ding' (or 'the object *a*') with the 'Lacan of the signifier'. Indeed, they are one and the same Lacan, just differences of perspective and stress" (2009, p. 88).

The Thing in Seminar VII (1959) is already real. In this perspective, it is indicative to see that, further in the text, Lacan remarks on the similarity between Luther's idea of an absolute evil at the bottom of human relationships and Kant's idea of a noumenal Good (das Gute). In this context, he calls the Thing "the cause of the most fundamental human passion" (1959, p. 97) – in other words, he sees the Thing already as cause of desire.

Notwithstanding that the Thing is already real, it is not yet clearly delineated from the Symbolic, and even the Imaginary. Here, it is interesting to see how Lacan, on the one page in Seminar VII (1959) where he mentions the object *a*, sees it as something different from the Thing. He sees it as the imaginary function that protects the subject from what it desires: "[...] the power of sublimation [...] is [...] an imaginary function, and, in particular, that for which we will use the symbolization of the phantasm ( $\$ \diamond a$ ), which is the form on which depends the subject's desire" (p. 99).

It is instructive to keep in mind that later in Lacan's work, the object *a* will englobe both what Lacan calls here the Thing and the object *a*. The object *a* will be both the Real that

is aimed at in desire and the imaginary construction that protects the subject from it; both the transcendental ground of desire and the instantiation of it in partial objects.

What does this analysis of Freud's reality principle bring us? It does not bring clarity about Freud's different principles and their interrelations with the Thing. Instead, one gets the feeling that Lacan bends Freud's concepts to his needs of the moment. But his complexification of Freud's concepts bears fruit in the sense that it prepares the ground for the introduction of the Thing by staking out some important coordinates. To summarize:

- 1 The reality principle seems related to the death drive as opposed to the pleasure principle.
- 2 There is a certain link between ethics and the Real.
- 3 The reality principle is in conflict with the pleasure principle, is a corrective principle, a call to order.
- 4 The experience of this conflictual character is moral.
- 5 The moral character of this conflictual experience is related to what Freud calls 'Wirklichkeit', to what Lacan, with an important twist, calls the Real.
- 6 The reality principle is linked to pain in a negative way.
- 7 In the reality principle, we see the Real at work.
- 8 The Real can only be approached by the subject by means of defenses.
- 9 The reality principle is linked to words as inner speech.
- 10 The Real is linked to the superego.
- 11 The signifier is to the Thing what the predicate is to the subject; the Thing appears through signifiers. The Thing is like a bad object, an evil center, against which the signifiers function as a defense.

## Lacan on the Thing

The main aim of our digression on Freud's "Project" (1950a) is, as said, to further prepare the ground for Lacan's conception of the Thing. In the next paragraphs, we will show how Lacan elaborates his take on the Thing. As often, instead of defining the concept, he rather enriches it gradually by slowly circumscribing it, by situating it against other concepts and by pointing out similarities and differences.

Following this approach, we focus first on what Lacan says about the Thing in relation to subjective structures. Secondly, we detail the major concepts he uses to elucidate the Thing, by focusing on some key passages of two important chapters of the Seminar, titled by its editor, Miller, simply *Das Ding* (1) and *Das Ding* (2) (Lacan, 1959, pp. 43-56; 57-70). In the course of these chapters, the stakes Lacan plants, slowly begin to reveal the contours of the concept.

As a conclusion, we will sum up nine major concepts Lacan connects closely to the Thing. This approach, we hope, will provide the reader with a clearer picture of the Thing, and prepare for our analysis of how Lacan reads Kant and Sade.

### *The Thing and subjective structure*

One of the reasons why we dwell at such length on the Thing, is because the relationship to the Thing allows one – later in Lacan's work – to understand something about the subjective structures, not in the least about perversion, notably how they are characterized by a specific relationship of the subject to the object *a*. Here, Lacan states that the relationship to the Thing gives contours to a great many forms of neurotic behavior: "If one goal of the specific action which aims for the experience of satisfaction is to reproduce the initial state, to find *das Ding*, the object, again, we will be able to understand a great many forms of neurotic behavior" (1959, p. 53).

Apart from linking the Thing to the Neurosenwahl, Freud's term for the 'choice of neurosis', this quote has the added benefit to show how Lacan's view of the Thing evolves out of Freud's. Lacan also pairs the Thing with 'the initial state', i.e. the lost object. Lacan is indeed quite explicit in making the link between the Thing and the lost object: "The world of our experience, the Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, das Ding, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again" (1959, pp. 52-53).

This 'initial state', is clearly linked to what the pleasure principle focuses on: the (hallucinatory) repetition of the original satisfaction, the object one tries to find back. Remark that, at the same time, Lacan calls das Ding 'the absolute Other' of the subject, which is, as we mentioned above, also related to the reality principle: the subject experiences the 'necessities of life', and passes through the Other with a 'specific action' (the cry) in order to find back the original satisfaction (now *not* hallucinated).

We see here clearly the link between Freud's 'Not des Lebens' (which Lacan seems to take here as synonym for the drives) and the 'spezifische Aktion' (specific action) in search for satisfaction: whenever a drive manifests itself, whenever the 'urgency' or 'need' of life reaches a certain level, the subject will try to find back the Thing to reproduce the original satisfaction (1959, p. 58).

Lacan also uses the Thing to speak about paranoia, and, much further in the text, also about Schreber (and thus about the psychotic subject structure). During the whole of this Seminar, as we will show, Lacan, be it rather indirectly, speaks also about the perverse structure. What he says about the subject's position according to das Ding in hysteria, obsessional neurosis and paranoia, the three major clinical categories Freud distinguishes in the beginning of this work, makes this link with subject structure clear: "It is then in relation to the original Ding that the first orientation, the first choice, the first seat of subjective orientation takes place" (1959 p. 54).

In other words: it is the relation to the Thing that determines subject structure. This is very similar to what we wrote about in the chapter on fetishism: there, it was the relationship to the missing phallus qua always already lost object that determined subjective structure. In other words: what the phallus was in Seminar IV (1956), the Thing is in Seminar VII (1959). To put it differently: in Seminar VII (1959), Lacan moves beyond the phallus.

What Lacan says about obsessional neurosis is worth mentioning in particular. It deals with the idea of *too much pleasure*, which Lacan thematizes as *jouissance*, as such a major concept in this Seminar, and of prime importance for an understanding of perversion:<sup>174</sup>

the obsessional [...] regulates his behavior so as to avoid what the subject often sees quite clearly as the goal and end of his desire. The motivation of this avoidance is often extraordinarily radical, since the pleasure principle is presented to us as possessing a mode of operation which is precisely to avoid excess, too much pleasure (1959, p. 54).

Put in other words, the obsessional neurotic subject structure – as indeed all subject structures – has the function of protecting the subject against what Lacan will call *jouissance*. Remember what Freud sees as the function of the pleasure principle: to bring the tension down, to refrain from excess, from *too much* as such, particularly, as *pleasure principle*, of *too much pleasure*. In this sense, it would probably have been clearer if Lacan would have referred to the constancy principle, which has the advantage of stressing more the aspect of avoidance of excess than that of pleasure.

At the same time, ‘the goal and end of one’s desire’, which threatens to bring ‘excess, too much pleasure’, says clearly what Lacan means with the Thing. The Thing is that which the subject tends to, what he aims at, his goal. Would it be reached, however, it would bring in its wake an excess of pleasure; that, which Lacan will come to call *jouissance*. In that way, in order to subsist as a subject, as that which is underlying the chain of signifiers, the subject needs to keep its distance to the Real.



## *Distance to the Real*

One of the ways in which Lacan characterizes the Thing is as the object, to which the subject needs to keep a distance. Moreover, we could say that das Ding is the object, to which the subject *is* the distance.<sup>175</sup> Lacan, as an object relation theorist, states that the subject needs to *regulate* his *distance* to the Thing, and also that this regulation *is* the pleasure principle. In that sense, the Thing, which we desire in view of providing us with infinite pleasure, is doomed to stay not only beyond pleasure, but also beyond the signified:

Das Ding is that which I will call the beyond-of-the-signified. It is as a function of this beyond-of-the-signified and of an emotional relationship to it that the subject keeps its distance and is constituted in a kind of relationship characterized by primary affect, prior to any repression (1959, p. 54).

This beyond-of-the-signified is also reminiscent of what Lacan said about the fetish: it keeps the ‘gap’ of the missing female phallus, in other words, the traumatic element, in other words the Thing or the Real, at bay, at a ‘right’ distance – by disavowing the lack of the female phallus. This keeping at bay, this maintenance of the distance towards the Thing is, as we will show, crucial in the functioning of the phantasm as the support of desire.

## *The death drive*

How do we relate the Thing to the death drive? It should be clear by now that the death drive is that, what drives us to the Thing, towards bridging the distance that separates us from the Thing. De Kesel gives an interesting synoptic reading in terms of object relation theory:

This is what the Freudian notion of the death principle comes down to, according to Lacan: the lethal tendency to overcome the distance toward the “thing”. Yet, it is only a tendency. For normally, the libidinal economy does not smash into pieces on the “thing” but keeps circling around it. Thanks to the autonomous, “lateral” operation of signifiers — that is, thanks to the fact that they continuously refer to

one another – they interminably keep missing their sighted target (the “thing”), and in this sense continuously fall “around” it. This fruitful failure is the work of the pleasure principle (De Kesel, 2009, p. 98).

This nice Kepler-like metaphor lets us imagine the libidinal economy in orbit, its trajectory determined by the resultant of two forces: the centripetal force of the death drive and the uniform linear motion of the pleasure-principle. At the same time, the metaphor equates Freud’s death drive with Lacan’s attraction towards the Thing and Freud’s pleasure-principle with Lacan’s (‘lateral’) operation of signifiers.<sup>176</sup>

Note the fact that De Kesel speaks about the libidinal economy in orbit around the Thing here, not about the subject. To expand on De Kesel’s metaphor in his own terms, the subject would rather be the distance between the libidinal economy and the Thing. This makes it easier to understand De Kesel when he says that the subject *is* the object relation; in other words: the subject is a resultant of tensions between signifiers and the Thing, between the Symbolic and the Real.

But what happens when this distance is *not* maintained? When the signifiers fail to operate their metonymy, their fruitful failure? What happens when we cross the line, when we give in to the call of the death drive? Do we die? Are we annihilated?

De Kesel’s view is here – even if he mixes up between subject and libidinal economy – , once more, original: according to him, the *subject* can never reach the Thing *as subject* – there wouldn’t be any distance, and thus no subject left (De Kesel, 2009, p. 98-99).

The *libidinal being*, however, we claim, *can* reach the Thing. In the approach of the Thing, the subject fades. But what happens then, is still *jouissance*: the satisfaction, however, happens to the body – as real, as carrier of the subject.

But more on *jouissance* later. For now, we will concentrate on what exactly it is that keeps us from giving in to the call of the death drive. Signifiers, as the planet-metaphor shows, but also, in another instantiation of the Symbolic, the Law.

### *The Thing grounds the Law*

Just like Freud in the example mentioned above, Lacan says that the Thing is also the *mother*. He indeed calls it literally “the maternal thing” (1959, p. 63). It is, of course, exactly this maternal Thing that is forbidden by the prohibition of incest:

It is to the extent that the function of the pleasure principle is to make man always search for what he has to find again, but which he never will attain, that one reaches the essence, namely, that sphere or relationship which is known as the law of the prohibition of incest (1959, p. 64).

To Lacan, in the footsteps of Freud and Levi-Strauss, the prohibition of incest is the primordial *law*, the law *as such*, which is also the basis of desire: one only desires what is forbidden (1959, p. 63). Lacan finds this primordial law incorporated in the ten commandments, which gives him the occasion to draw attention to the link between the *law* and *speech*.

we recognize that the prohibition of incest is nothing other than the condition sine qua non of speech. This brings us back to questioning the meaning of the ten commandments insofar as they are tied in the deepest of ways to that which regulates the distance between the subject and das Ding – insofar as that distance is precisely the condition of speech, insofar as the ten commandments are the condition of the existence of speech as such (1959, p. 69).

This rich quote uses three basic concepts for the circumscription of the Thing: the law (in its instantiation as the ten commandments), the regulation of the distance between subject and Thing, and the condition of existence of speech as such. It explains nicely how the subject has to be maintained at a certain distance of the Thing, and allows us also to illustrate once more that the Thing can be seen as an instantiation of the Real (see above), and that the force that regulates the distance with the Real can be seen as the realm of the Symbolic.

But there is more. In the sense that it is the (maternal) Thing that is forbidden in the prohibition of incest, one can argue that the Thing *grounds* the prohibition of incest, in other words: it grounds the law *as such*. And, as incest is the fundamental desire, in

grounding the law, the Thing also grounds *desire*; moreover, it grounds desire as distance to the Thing:

What can we say about such a desire, a desire that needs a law in order to exist? Speaking with the terms of Freud's second topica, we can say that it is desire for death: The dialectical relationship between desire and the Law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the Law, through which it becomes the desire for death (1959, pp. 83-84).

### *The Thing and the superego*

Lacan characterizes the superego as "the obscene and ferocious figure in which the moral agency appears when we seek it at its root", while its commands are called "half-unconscious, paradoxical, and morbid" (1959, p. 7). He speaks as well about "the duty" one "feels within like a stranger" (p. 7).

To understand why, we first draw attention to the parallel Lacan sees between the superego and the reality principle:

The whole function of that which Freud articulates in the term superego, Uber-Ich, is tied to the reality principle. And this would be no more than a banal play of words, if it were merely an alternative way of designating what has been called the moral conscience or something similar (p. 66).

This has to be interpreted in the sense that the superego is the way – or at least one of the ways – the Thing intrudes in the subject. In which form does this intrusion happen? As an enigmatic, morbid command.

### Conclusion to the introduction of the Thing

To conclude this section on Lacan's view on the Thing, we list in a simple table the concepts that form the net in which Lacan tries to capture the Thing:

the Thing
the lost object
the maternal Thing
the Other (as real)
jouissance
the superego
the enigmatic command
the voice
the condition of speech
the reality principle

Table 6 The conceptual network around the Thing

At the end of the chapters on the Thing, there is a quote that summarizes quite well what the Thing means to Lacan at this point, englobing quite some of the circumscribing concepts in one sentence:

the step taken by Freud at the level of the pleasure principle is to show us that there is no Sovereign Good – that the Sovereign Good, which is das Ding, which is the mother, is also the object of incest, is a forbidden good, and that there is no other good. Such is the foundation of the moral law as turned on its head by Freud (Lacan, 1959, p. 70).

Just a few lines further, one finds another indispensable quote, at first sight enigmatic, upon analysis clearly pointing towards Lacan's view of the object *a* in Seminar X: "what you were looking for in the place of the object that cannot be found again is the object that one always finds again in reality" (1962, p. 70).

In other words: the Thing is not merely (always already) lost, but it can, in a certain way, be found again, notably in *reality* – to be more precise: in the Real. In our interpretation, Lacan shows here that the Thing is not something only purely negative, but also something that can be encountered, even if the encounter is lethal, even if it brings suffering. This interpretation points in the direction of the equivalence between the Thing

and the object *a* that we already mentioned above.<sup>177</sup> This could be described as the way the Thing presentifies itself through the Symbolic and/or the Imaginary, and which Lacan describes in Seminar X (1962) as the *cause* of desire.<sup>178</sup> The fact that Lacan literally calls the Thing “the cause of the most fundamental human passion” (1959, p. 97) corroborates this reading.

While Lacan almost never reuses the concept of the Thing after Seminar VII (1959), the object *a*, *jouissance* and the Real stay main concepts until the very end of his teaching. We will focus on the concept of *jouissance* later, because it introduces a new and more precise way of thinking the Thing.

Lacan ends the chapters on the Thing with a pointer towards his analysis of Kant and Sade, which we will turn to in the following paragraph:

The real, I have told you, is that which is always in the same place. [This] is indispensable if we are to reach the great revolutionary crisis of morality, namely, the systematic questioning of principles there where they need to be questioned, that is, at the level of the imperative. That is the culminating point for both Kant and Sade with relation to the Thing; it is there that morality becomes, on the one hand, a pure and simple application of the universal maxim and, on the other, a pure and simple object (1959, p. 70).

It is only now that we are properly equipped to address what Lacan has to say about Kant and Sade in Seminar VII (1959). What Lacan says about Kant and Sade leans so heavily on his concept of the Thing, that is not possible to properly understand the former without a decent understanding of the latter. Moreover, in studying Kant, Sade and their relation, Lacan paves the way for the study of the Sadean phantasm, and for the articulation of the position of the subject of perversion in terms of the relationship with the object *a* and the Other, and in terms of *jouissance* – all concepts intimately linked to the concept of the Thing.

## Kant and Sade in Seminar VII

In the sixth chapter of the Seminar, “On the moral law” (1959, pp 71-85), Lacan articulates the Thing with two at first sight utterly unrelated texts: Kant’s “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788) and Sade’s “Philosophy in the Bedroom” (1795). This articulation doesn’t stop at the end of this chapter, but is continued across the entire Seminar, although in a less structured, more haphazard manner. It is on the basis of this material that about five years later, Lacan publishes the short text “Kant with Sade” (1966), which we’ll turn to in the next part.

In order to prepare an analysis of this unruly text, in this paragraph we firstly recall briefly the main points of Kant’s second critique. Secondly, we focus on how Lacan (re-)articulates the Thing with Kant’s concepts of the good (*das Wohl*) and the Good (*das Gute*) *and* with the idea of *evil*. Thirdly, we examine how Lacan reads Sade’s unconventional writings which, as he claims, show ‘the truth’ of Kant. It is only then that we will be properly equipped to address one of the key parts of Lacan’s argument, notably his reading of Kant’s two ‘apologues’. Finally, we will focus on some key concepts Lacan extracts from or confronts with his reading of Sade at the time of Seminar VII (1959), because they are the cornerstones for Lacan’s later elaboration of perversion in “Kant with Sade” (1966) and in Seminar X (1962).

### Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason

The fact that Lacan will not only be briefly referring to Kant’s “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788) is clearly stated: “It is impossible for us to make any progress in this Seminar relative to the questions posed by the ethics of psychoanalysis if you do not have this book as a reference point” (Lacan, 1959, p. 71).

In order to provide some necessary context for our argument, we briefly recall some of the main points of Kant’s second critique:

1 The “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788) deals with the faculty for determining the will. The practical reason which determines our actions, operates by applying a general, practical principle of action to one’s particular situation. There are two kinds of such principles: “Practical principles are propositions which contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or maxims, when the condition is regarded by the subject as valid only for his own will, but are objective, or practical laws, when the condition is recognized as objective, that is, valid for the will of every rational being” (Kant, 1788, p. 17).

2 How now can such practical laws be arrived at? Not, Kant answers, by striving to find an object of the faculty of desire, for these are merely empirical, and can therefore not be valid for the will of every rational being. If we want to be ‘free’, i.e. if we want to be free from the empirical, from the world of senses, from the phenomenal, we have to obey universal laws, and make abstraction of our contingent desires: pleasure and pain should not influence our actions if we want them to be moral. Thus, Kant reasons, what is Good in itself (das Gute an sich) cannot lay in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, because pleasure and pain are merely contingent.

3 What can be Good in itself, then? What must we strive for? What is the object, the content of a universal moral law? If the *content* is to be independent from the contingent desires of the law’s subject (from the ‘pathological’, as he puts it), it can only be found in the law’s *form*: “A rational being cannot regard his maxims as practical universal laws”, Kant argues, “unless he conceives them as principles which determine the will, not by their matter, but by their form only” (Kant, 1788, p. 25).

4 The only law for which form and content coincide is the categorical imperative. The first formulation Kant gives, is the clearest: “Act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation” (Kant, 1788, p. 30).



5 Apart from this main line of reasoning from Kant's second critique, we also have to mention one of Kant's minor conceptual distinctions which will be necessary to follow Lacan's text. It is the difference between 'das Wohl' (translated by good with lowercase 'g') and 'das Gute' (translated by the Good with capital 'G'). To go short, 'das Wohl' is the 'selfish', 'pleasurable', 'pathological' good our desire strives after, that what brings wellbeing, while 'das Gute' is the 'noumenal' Good that obeying the moral law brings.

Let us now examine how Lacan reads Kant's second critique.

## The good, the evil and the Thing

### *Kant's radicalism*

In his commentary on the Critique, Lacan often stays quite close to the main line of Kant's text. The point he stresses most is the fact that Kant sees the moral law as something entirely formal, freed of any specific content apart from its form and, as such, objectless. He stresses even more that for Kant, moral action is as such devoid of sentiment or 'pathos': it is not driven by passion or desire, but by reason. It is Kant's 'radicalization', his 'extremism' in barring all and every desire or affect from moral action – save for one, as we will explain – that fascinates Lacan most: "the central formula of Kant's ethics, is pursued by him to the limit of its consequences. His radicalism even leads to the paradox that in the last analysis the gute Wille, good will, is posited as distinct from any beneficial action" (Lacan, 1959, p. 77).

Why is this so radical? Not only because it is counterintuitive, and totally opposite to anything that has been thought about ethics before Kant, not only because it is – as Kant admits – impossible to live by such a law, but mostly because of the *absolute* character of it. It is this radicalism that leads Lacan to an interesting image (in which he imprecisely says 'maxim' where he should say 'law'):

If, of course, no one has ever been able to put such a moral axiom into practice – even Kant himself did not believe it possible – it is nevertheless useful to see how far things have gone [...] when we reflect on the maxim that guides our action, Kant is inviting us to consider it for an instant as the law of a nature in which we are called upon to live. That is where one finds the apparatus that would have us reject in horror some maxim or other that our instincts would gladly lead us to (1959, p. 77).

Lacan does not only say about Kant's moral law that it is something that is impossible to obey, he also characterizes it as an apparatus that guides our actions, as laws of nature determining inanimate objects. What is this apparatus? What is this nature? It is, Lacan claims, made of the same stuff as science; it resembles science in its form of a blind automaton. This becomes clear in the following quote, in which Lacan deplores what he calls the 'insistence' of science – which one can read as the insistence of the Real:

one must have submitted oneself to the test of reading this text [i.e. the Critique] in order to measure the extreme, almost insane character of the corner that we have been backed into by something that is after all present in history, namely, the existence, indeed the insistence, of science (1959, p. 77).

This insistence of science makes Lacan venture a thought experiment; he asks the reader to imagine a new version, an update of the categorical imperative to suit the recent scientific developments: "Never act except in such a way that your action may be programmed" (1959, p. 77). The emptiness of such a program, the mere repetition of signifiers without a subject, the insistence of it, are similar to the insistence of traumatic repetition, and, as such, to the intrusion of the Real in the subject. In other words, while it is, of course, a symbolic activity, science, for Lacan, is as well an incarnation of the Thing, of the Real: "it is as a pure signifying system, as a universal maxim, as that which is the most lacking in a relationship to the individual, that the features of das Ding must be presented" (1959, p. 55).

To summarize: Kant is radical because he places the Thing at the center of moral action. Detouring Hegel's saying, one could say: What is real is moral; and what is moral is real. This link between the Thing and Kantian morality is crucial to understand anything Lacan has to say about the object *a* in general and its place in perversion in particular.

### *The Thing: a topological problem*

But how can the Thing be presented as a signifying system? In other words: how can the Real be presented as symbolic? Of course, this is paradoxical; it shows a certain difficulty in Lacan's speaking about the Thing. It is not surprising that Lacan starts the sixth lesson of the Seminar with the question of the relation between the enigmatic Thing and signifiers. He stresses the difficulty of sketching a satisfactory topology of the Thing and the signifiers – i.e. an adequate way to picture the relations between both concepts. One cannot just draw the Thing at the center and signifiers around it. Lacan thinks the Thing as an exterior center, as something extimate:<sup>179</sup>

in reality das Ding has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that it is impossible to forget – the Other whose primacy of position Freud affirms in the form of something entfremdet, something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me (1959, p. 71).

Chiesa uses the concepts of real Other and symbolic Other to describe this topological problem (2007, pp. 122-123)<sup>180</sup>. This distinction has the merit to show that for Lacan, the Other is a concept that not simply coincides with the symbolic order. What Lacan writes as the prehistoric Other is here clearly not 'the Other as signifiers' to put it simply, hence the idea of a 'real Other'.

Another similar topological issue, one that Lacan's reading of Kant opens, is the question about the *moral* status of the Thing; to put it simple: is the Thing 'good' or 'bad'? At first sight, Lacan doesn't bring much solace: he evokes "the good that das Ding brings with it" (1959, p. 71), the Thing as "bad object" (p. 73), "the extreme good that das Ding may bring" (p. 73) and the idea that "evil may be in the Thing" (p. 124).

How can this knot be disentangled? How can the Thing be at the same time good, extremely good, bad, and evil?

When Lacan speaks about the Thing as something that brings good (with a small 'g'), this good refers to pleasure, to that which is attainable by the pleasure principle and the reality principle when it is merely seen as the pleasure principle's 'extension' – and as long as the reality principle does not go 'beyond' the pleasure principle.

Such a good is, as said above, determined by a right, safe *distance* to the Thing. This good is, in Kant's terms, the 'Wohl', merely 'well-being', and as such 'pathological', contingent, phenomenal. For Kant, it has nothing to do with the categorical imperative, with what is moral, with the noumenal or the absolute; it has nothing to do with the Good as *das Gute*. As Lacan puts it, the good that the Thing brings "lures the subject away from a direct approach of *das Ding*" (1959 p. 72).

At the same time, we have to keep in mind that, while the pleasure principle keeps the subject at bay from the Thing, Lacan speaks as well about an attraction to the Thing. The subject is attracted to the Thing, as if it were the *supreme Good* or *summum bonum*, an attraction beyond the phenomenal good, beyond pleasure.

It is in this beyond that the Thing can reveal itself as 'bad object' or, even, simply, as 'evil'.

Firstly, it is, Lacan seems to say, a question of 'measure': the *good* the Thing brings is 'extreme' when one approaches it too closely; in other words it is *Good*. But the subject "cannot stand the extreme good that *das Ding* may bring him" (1959, p. 73).

It is exactly this extreme good, in other words this extreme pleasure, this beyond-of-pleasure, this, what the death drive tends to, that Lacan comes to call *jouissance*.

Lacan stresses that the Good is only a metaphor, a way of speaking about how presentations (we propose this concept to denote what causes re-presentations), how the Real as such invades the subject, a way of speaking about the Thing, an attribute used to name what is without attributes. One could, and Lacan does, use with the same right the metaphor – or the attribute – 'evil' to characterize the same concept (1959 p. 32; p. 70; p. 97).

As said, it is this beyond of pleasure (and of the pleasure principle) that Freud calls the death drive – and that which Lacan will call *jouissance*. Lacan is clear about this:

Freud at the end of his thinking discovers once again the field of *das Ding*, and points out to us the space beyond the pleasure principle. It is an ethical paradox that the field of *das Ding* is rediscovered at the end, and that Freud suggests there that which in life might prefer death. And it is along this path that he comes closer than anyone else to the problem of evil (1959, p. 104).

We could add: ...and to the problem of that which in pleasure might prefer pain.

### *The evil of the Real and the law*

But there is one concept missing in our elaboration in the former paragraph of the ideas of the Thing as 'good', 'bad' and 'evil', namely the concept of the law.

Lacan indeed describes the Thing as that which always-already makes the law. But not just *any* law, because 'any law' is a societal convention and as such imminently symbolic. No, Lacan speaks about the Thing as a *capricious* law that takes away every certainty ('*Sicherung*' in German) of the subject:

Das Ding presents itself at the level of unconscious experience as that which already makes the law [...] It is a capricious and arbitrary law, the law of the oracle, the law of signs in which the subject receives no guarantee from anywhere, the law in relation to which he has no *Sicherung*, to use another Kantian term (1959, p. 73).

This Thing that always-already 'makes' the law is to be found back as well in the way in which these laws or ethical imperative principles are formulated when they impose themselves on us, i.e. on our 'moral conscience' as Kant called it: namely as commandments, arriving to us as if from an oracle.

Putting it like this makes the link between the superego and the Thing particularly clear; moreover, it paves the way for the object *a* as voice that Lacan will develop in Seminar X (1962).

Strangely enough, Baas, in his interesting essay on “Kant with Sade” (1987), does not make this link. He bases himself on a typographic particularity of the text: now and then, Lacan writes ‘law’, with a small ‘l’, now and then ‘Law’, with a capital ‘L’. Baas, however, claims these are two different concepts: the law with a small ‘l’ would designate the societal law, the law of repressed desire, the Freudian law, while the Law with an uppercase ‘L’ would designate the law of the Thing, as the cause of desire. While he sees the ‘law’ as linked to the superego, he sees the ‘Law’ as linked to the Thing (Baas, 1987, p. 67).

While this sounds like an interesting differentiation, it is based on loose sand. However hard one tries, it is impossible to find a system that would explain why Lacan uses Law rather than law or the other way around in “Kant with Sade” (1966). Suffice it to say that now and then, Lacan speaks about Kant’s law and now and then about the Law of Kant, when he is pointing to one and the same thing.

Moreover, we don’t see any reason not to withhold the link Thing-superego, in the sense that the superego – as ‘voice from within’ – is an instance of the Thing; as Lacan will put it in Seminar X (1962), the voice is one of the forms of the object *a*.

Another, not directly apparent, link with the law is a link with the reality principle as that which imposes itself on us (1959, p. 74), that, in other words, for which we need to forego pleasure. And a last interesting link is that between the law and ‘signs’: when Lacan says ‘the law of signs’, he means signs which are not part of a signifying chain, signs that are not borne by a subject; as such these are ‘enigmatic’ signs, signs in relationship to which we have no ‘Sicherung’, no ‘safeguard’; signs that belong rather to the Real than to the Symbolic. It are these that Lacan will later represent by the symbol  $S_1$ .<sup>181</sup>

De Kesel gives a remarkable but interesting twist to the link between the Good and the law when he speaks about the idea of the Good as that which ‘lures’ the subject into desiring the ‘beyond’ of the law: he calls this idea, in Kant’s terms, a transcendental illusory appearance:

[the] Good supposed to lie beyond the law turns out to be an illusion. Even if ethics still spontaneously clings to it, this idea is nothing but a 'transcendental illusory appearance' (De Kesel, 2009, p. 117).

This 'transcendental illusory appearance' is a nice name for what Lacan calls the phantasm; the 'illusion' underpinning the (split) subject's desire is that its (structural) lack can be overcome by joining the forbidden object-alien-Thing, to put it in Lacanese. Keep in mind, however, that this 'joining' of the Thing in the phantasm is only *imaginary*.<sup>182</sup>

But this still does not tell us what the nature of this evil is. To put it in its simplest terms: do we die if we experience this overwhelming *pleasure*? Not necessarily, but we do not, in a certain sense, *experience* it either – at least not as *subject*; the beyond of pleasure is structurally incompatible with the subject as subject of the signifying chain.

When the subject's pleasure becomes excessive, the subject vanishes or 'fades', to use another Lacanian term; he – or better: 'it' – becomes an object. The subject is always the subject of the chain of signifiers. As such, it is incompatible with the Thing – instead it is a defense against the intrusion of the Thing: it is when the bearer of the chain of signifiers meets something that cannot be related to these signifiers, that the subject 'fades'. In other words, when the joining of the Thing is real, the subject stops being the bearer of the signifying chain, to become the object of the Thing – which is why the Thing is 'evil'.

One of Lacan's main points is that one finds such 'evil' at work in Kant's categorical imperative. Inventive as always, in his effort to confront the reader with this 'repressed truth of Kant', Lacan makes a move one would least expect: a close-reading of the infamous marquis Sade.

As a parenthesis, it is interesting to follow the line De Kesel draws: it leads him to claim that this 'evil' that ethics – and the reality-principle or death drive in general – brings, is 'not really bad for the subject':

Yet, the form of "death" that comes with enjoyment is, at least in principle, phantasmatic, and thus, not really bad for the subject. In other words, when I

enjoy, I am not really but only symbolically “destroyed.” The moment I “fade away” in the desired object, I do so in my existence qua symbolic subject, not as a real person. It is solely as a subject of desire that I am absent in the very moment of enjoyment. That is to say, enjoyment itself is only granted insofar as it is completely unconscious and assumes no real proportions (De Kesel, 2009, p. 125).

This conclusion is not only wrong; in a clinical context it could be dangerous. De Kesel is right indeed when he claims the *subject* is absent in enjoyment. But that does not have to mean that the *jouissance* has to be merely phantasmal or symbolical. What De Kesel seems to forget is that the subject, which is subjacent (from the Latin *sub-iacere*, literally ‘to throw under’) to, which is bearer of the chain of signifiers, is itself borne by a body, in other words, that there is a body which is subjacent to the subject. This body is real, and its subsistence is, in our opinion, crucial for the subsistence of the subject. To put it bluntly: when in clinical practice a psychotic patient gives into an egotistic *jouissance* that harms his body, a neurotic patient suffers severely from the *jouissance* of his symptom or a pervert threatens to act on his phantasm, we should help them to impose limits; we should not let just let them have their *jouissance* ‘because they are not there as a real person’. In other words: the Thing and the *jouissance* it brings are potentially really lethal. *Jouissance* does really happen.

But Lacan has more to say about the relationship between the law and the Thing. One of his further points – as already discussed in our part on Seminar VI (1958) – is that the law animates our desire to break it. In that sense, the law is the *motor* of our desire for the Thing. This shows, once more, the idea of the object *a* as cause of desire, that Lacan will elaborate in Seminar X (1962), and the link between the object *a* and the law.

In the context of the link between the object *a* and the law, Lacan’s idea of desire as desire of the Other, crops up again as well, in the idea that our desire for the Thing is only possible through the desire of what Lacan calls our *neighbor*.

Commenting on the commandment “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, neither his man servant, nor his maid servant, neither his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that belongs to thy neighbor”, he says:



das Ding insofar as it is the very correlative of the law of speech in its most primitive point of origin, and in the sense that this Ding was there from the beginning, that it was the first thing that separated itself from everything the subject began to name and articulate, that the covetousness that is in question is not addressed to anything that I might desire but to a thing that is my neighbor's (1959, p. 83).

It is interesting to note that Lacan speaks of the Thing as being there at the origin, and being "separated off" from the subject – two important vectors of his later characterizations of the object *a*.

It is also in this context that Lacan relates the law to speech, and the possibility of speech to the existence of the law. When he analyses the commandment "Thou shalt not lie", he says that in it, "is included the possibility of the lie as the most fundamental desire" (Lacan, 1959, p. 86).

One should not misunderstand: speech is founded by the Thing, i.e. the Thing is at the origin of the fact that the subject is split by the signifier, but that what is founded by speech is the *distance* to the Thing. The Thing is what escapes speech. As such, one cannot desire an object autonomously; our desire is heteronomous. It is only through the fact that our neighbor desires an object that we can desire it. In that sense, my neighbor's 'object' seems to me the cause, the motor of his desire, seems therefore to be his 'Thing'. The fact that it is forbidden to me, is the cause of my desire, to which the law keeps me at a distance.

Concluding, we state our hope that these paragraphs will have equipped the reader enough to place the Thing in the network of key concepts (the object *a*, jouissance, the Real, the split subject, the Other, the law) that Lacan will use and rework; firstly, to devise the Sadean phantasm in "Kant with Sade" (1966) and, secondly, to rethink sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962).

But before turning to a detailed analysis of “Kant with Sade” (1966), we’ll study in detail what Lacan already says about Sade in Seminar VII (1959), as it is purely on the basis of this that Lacan will crystallize his ideas in “Kant with Sade” (1966).

### ...and Sade

When Lacan introduces his interest for the work of the infamous marquis, he wants the audience of his Seminar to feel a shock:

So as to produce the kind of shock or eye-opening effect that seems to me necessary if we are to make progress, I simply want to draw your attention to this: if *The Critique of Practical Reason* appeared in 1788, seven years after the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, there is another work which came out six years after *The Critique of Practical Reason*, a little after Thermidor in 1795, and which is called *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1959, p. 78).

This “*Philosophy in the Bedroom*” (Sade, 1795) is a collection of seven dialogues that follow three aristocrats as they educate the fifteen-year-old Eugénie de Mistival in the principles of an extreme kind of libertinism. The libertine Dolmancé explains to Eugénie that morality, compassion, religion and modesty are all absurd notions that stand in the way of the sole aim of human existence: pleasure.

Lacan gives a good picture of Sade’s work, linking its literary style with its content:

It seems, in fact, as if one cannot conceive of an atrocity that isn’t to be found in Sade’s catalogue. The assault on one’s sensibility is of a kind that is literally stupefying; in other words, one loses one’s bearings. As far as this is concerned, one might even say that the effect in question is achieved artlessly, without any consideration for an economy of means, but through the accumulation of details and peripetia, to which is added a whole stuffing of treatises and rationalizations whose contradictions are of particular interest to us and that we can analyze in detail (1959, p. 201).

From the onset, it is clear that Lacan studies this work for its coherent theoretical claims rather than for its shocking depictions of forbidden pleasures. Moreover, Lacan describes these depictions as boring (p. 78).

Indeed, like a lot of Sade's work, "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795) features a great deal of explicit descriptions of incest, pedophilia, homosexuality, sodomy, rape and torture, and a great deal of repetition as all of the above are endlessly combined and permuted in every scenario imaginable. Notwithstanding, the main content consists of a consequently elaborated libertine philosophy, to be found in its most condensed form in the fifth of the seven dialogues. It carries the title "Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become republicans" (Sade, 1795, pp. 91-130), and is disguised as a political pamphlet that entices the Frenchmen, now they have done away with their monarch, to take one step more and do away with religion in order to found a real liberated republic. While Sade begins the dialogue carefully with the praise of calumny, he ends by tackling point per point the reversal of the fundamental imperatives of the moral law, pleading for incest, adultery, theft, rape, murder and so on. It is on this dialogue, in which Sade more or less reverses the laws of the Decalogue, that Lacan focuses his analysis (cf. 1959 p. 78).

But why, apart from their contemporaneity and their contrast, does Lacan put Sade's pamphlet alongside Kant's second critique? In order to answer this question, we will first expand on two similarities Lacan finds in both texts. Firstly, Lacan claims both authors use the same formalism. Secondly, he finds that they both claim that real ethical behavior is and must be totally dispassionate; the only feeling that can accompany it is *pain*.

### *Formalism*

In what way do Sade's and Kant's texts share the same formalism? The most direct indication of this claim is to be found when Lacan speaks about the "Kantian criteria" Sade advances to justify "a kind of anti-morality" (1959, p. 78).

Where could one find these 'Kantian criteria' in Sade?

First, we look at Sade's text. His pamphlet is split in two parts, titled 'Religion' and 'Manners'. The first part argues for a state without religion; the second part, which Sade calls the most important (1795, p.92) argues that the laws of the new republic should be based on a reversal of the manners of the French. These manners, which Sade attacks, are what was considered up to that point – and still is today – as the essential minimum of morality.

In this attack on French 'manners' or 'duties', Sade proceeds methodically. He discerns three categories: duties with regard to a supreme being, to our brethren, and duties to ourselves (1795, p. 92). While in the first category religious duties are quickly dealt with as absurd and in the last category the right to commit suicide is proposed as self-evident, the main part of the pamphlet deals with the 'injuries against our brethren'. Of these, Sade discerns four subcategories: calumny, theft, impurity and murder.

While quite some pages of the pamphlet apply themselves to the defense of murder, Sade's main focus lies on "the crimes which, caused by *impurity*, may in a disagreeable sense affect others" (1795, p. 102). The marquis promises to deal with four kinds of such crimes: prostitution, incest, rape and sodomy. In passing by, he also tackles adultery, debauchery, lust and pedophilia.

Sade deals with these arborescent manners one by one, and often stresses he is being "methodical", the necessity of "letting things follow from first principles", the need "to do away with prejudices" and "to be logical" (cf. a.o. 1795, p. 100).

In his almost Nietzschean but methodical reversal of values, Sade, however, leaves some values untouched. Apart from the above cited praise for logic, method and principles, Sade also values the virtues of courage and liberty (1795, p. 92). But, more importantly, the idea of 'being in accordance to Nature' and her 'laws' seems to function as the final criterion by which Sade judges if manners or laws are to be promulgated or not. For instance, when discussing that "The point is not at all to love one's brethren as

oneself", he argues this is so because it "is in defiance of all laws of Nature, and [...] hers is the sole voice which must direct all the actions in our life" (1795, p. 100).

But are the intention to be rational, a proclaimed veneration of enlightened ideas as courage and liberty and a belief in nature and its laws, all quite typical for the epoch, enough to claim that Sade applies Kantian criteria? Barely.

The crux of the 'Kantianism' of Sade lies elsewhere. Lacan's main point is that the pamphlet circles around a 'general law', a 'universal maxim'. This is what Lacan points at when he mentions Sade's 'Kantian criteria': the question if it is possible to universalize a proposed maxim, i.e. if it is possible to want the maxim to be applicable in every situation.

But which maxim? There is no such maxim to be found in "The Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795), even if Lacan seems to claim the contrary. In Sade's "Juliette" however, one does find something of the kind: "Pray avail me of that part of your body which is capable of giving me a moment's satisfaction, and, if you are so inclined, amuse yourself with whatever part of mine may be agreeable to you" (1797, p. 92).

It is obviously on the basis of this quote that Lacan formulates another, similar maxim, which he cites as if it were to be found in "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795). He (re)writes it as follows: "Let us take as the universal maxim of our conduct the right to enjoy any other person whatsoever as the instrument of our pleasure" (Lacan, 1959, p. 79).

Lacan immediately reformulates this 'right' in a, more active, invitation: "everyone is invited to pursue to the limit the demands of his lust, and to realize them" (p. 79).

In Sade's pamphlet, as said, there is no such clearly formulated, single, universal maxim. One can find, however, material enough to accept Lacan's reading that such a maxim subtends the text. This right – or this invitation – to use the other as an instrument for our pleasure, transpires the whole pamphlet.

The underlying thought of the maxim is mostly present in the part where Sade deals with 'impurity'. In it, we find a few dense paragraphs where, after having argued that every

man has the right to subdue forcefully any woman he desires, Sade addresses himself to women, granting them the same right in respect to man, and admonishing them as follows: “For a bridle have nothing but you inclinations, for laws only your desires” (1795, p. 110). Hence the Sade’s idea to have ‘stations’ or ‘houses’ build in which the law will force people to give into each other’s desires:

A man who would like to enjoy whatever woman or girl will henceforth be able, if the laws you promulgate are just, to have her summoned at once to duty at one of the houses; and there, under the supervision of the matrons of that temple of Venus, she will be surrendered to him, to satisfy, humbly and with submission; all the fancies in which he will be pleased to indulge with her, however strange and irregular they may be (Sade, 1795, p. 110).

The crux of Sade’s argument turns around the fact that such desires, ‘however strange and irregular they may be’, are only ‘natural’, or, to be more precise, that it is Nature, as supreme being, that has destined men to act like this. As Sade puts it: “No inclinations or tastes can exist in us save the ones we have from Nature” (Sade, 1795, p. 112).

In other words, Sade sees murder, incest, pedophilia and other atrocities, destruction in general, merely as ‘juggling the forms of nature’, and thus as something to be encouraged: “we affirm that the act you commit in juggling the forms of Nature’s different productions is of advantage to her, since thereby you supply her the primary material for her reconstructions, tasks which would be compromised were you to desist from destroying” (Sade, 1795, p. 116-117).

Besides, Kant as well, as we noted higher when discussing Kant’s radicalism, reserves a special place for nature in his system: he invites us, when we think about the categorical imperative, “to consider it for an instant as the law of a nature in which we are called upon to live” (as cited by Lacan, 1959, p. 72).

So, clearly, the *content* of what Lacan describes as Sade’s maxim, is present in the pamphlet. But we cannot say it really has the *form* of a Kantian practical law – i.e. as an universalizable maxim. It is Lacan himself who makes up the maxim and endows it with

the adjective ‘universal’. This is not a slight oversight on Lacan’s part: he will reuse this maxim, carefully reformulated, to hinge a large part of his text “Kant with Sade” (1966) on, which we will study later.<sup>183</sup>

### *Dispassionate, save for pain*

Now that it is clear that Lacan sees the ‘Sadean maxim’ as answering formally the ‘Kantian criteria’, we will concentrate on Lacan’s second claim, which is of more importance to our argument. The claim is that Kant and Sade both see ethical behavior as necessarily totally dispassionate, literally a-pathetic; contradictorily, for both authors, there is however only one feeling that can accompany ethical behavior: *pain*.

That Kant is proposing such a dispassionate, content-less, object-less ethics, may be clear from the main points of the second critique we summed up higher.

That Sade does the same, can be seen when we analyze what he does ‘give us the right to do’, what he is ‘inviting us to do’. He invites the subject to transgresses the fundamental societal interdictions on incest, rape and murder. What keeps us, social subjects, from such a transgression are *feelings* or passions. Feelings like repulsion, shame and disgust – the things Freud saw as the fruit of the superego. Of course, Sade’s ‘maxim’ is repulsive, shameful and disgusting, Sade doesn’t claim the contrary. But he invites us to make abstraction of these feelings.

What, seems to be Lacan’s reasoning, would Kant think of such feelings? According to Kant, feelings as repulsion, shame and disgust, and all feelings in general are only sentimental, only pathological – literally things that affect our soul from outside; pathos comes from the Greek πασχω, to suffer, to undergo. They should not play any role in ethics, in our decisions on what to do, which have to be purely based on rational motives.

This parallel between Sade and Kant makes Lacan claim:

If one eliminates from morality every element of sentiment, if one removes or invalidates all guidance to be found in sentiments, then in the final analysis the

Sadian world is conceivable – even if it is its inversion, its caricature – as one of the possible forms of the world governed by a radical ethics, by the Kantian ethics as elaborated in 1788 (1959, p. 79).

In other words: what stands in the way between us neurotics and what Sade proposes, are ‘merely’ feelings, is ‘pathological’. And this is without any doubt what makes Sade ‘Kantian’ in part. Moreover, it is exactly this astounding aporia that interests Lacan, that makes up his basic discovery in Seminar VII (1959): the aporia that an a-pathetic, rational – to be short, a ‘radical’ – ethic – here covering Sadean *and* Kantian ethics – is also a perverse ethic:

in its search for justification, for a base and support, in the sense of reference to the reality principle, ethics encounters its own stumbling block, its failure – I mean there where an aporia opens up in that mental articulation we call ethics [...] We are thus faced here with a question, that is to say, the question of the relationship to das Ding (1959, pp. 79-80).

Lacan takes a shortcut here. It is clear that the aporia he refers to, is the aporia that a ‘rational’ ethic is perverse. But how this has impact on the question of the relationship to the Thing, is less clear. When we remember that Lacan speaks about the Thing as a capricious law that takes every certainty (‘Sicherung’) away from the subject, that the Thing presents itself at the level of unconscious experience as that which already makes the law (1959, p. 73), the question becomes clearer.

So, what is this relationship between ethics and the Thing, popping up its ugly head when we try to see what is common between Kant and Sade? “Pain”, answers Lacan, citing as the source of his answer this following quote of the third chapter of the “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788): “Consequently, we can see a priori that the moral law as the determining principle of will, by reason of the fact that it sets itself against our inclinations, must produce a feeling that one could call pain” (1959, p. 80).

Lacan, as so often, is sloppy in quoting. Kant’s proper text is the following:

What is essential in every determination of the will by the moral law is that, as a free will – and so not only without the cooperation of sensible impulses but even



with rejection of all of them and with infringement upon all inclinations insofar as they could be opposed to that law – it is determined solely by the law. So far, then, the effect of the moral law as incentive is only negative, and as such this incentive can be cognized a priori. For, all inclination and every sensible impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (by the infringement upon the inclinations that takes place) is itself feeling. Hence we can see a priori that the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain; and here we have the first and perhaps the only case in which we can determine a priori from concepts the relation of a cognition (here the cognition of a pure practical reason) to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (Kant, 1788, p. 61).

Reading the complete quote gives more body to Lacan's reasoning. It shows that, according to Kant, the moral law determines our actions by *rejecting* all inclinations – at least, so far as they might be opposed to the moral law. Pain, however, is the *consequence* of this rejection, and as such it is the only pathologic and phenomenal correlative of the moral law.

Next, Lacan argues the – quite obvious – point that pain accompanies Sade's 'moral acts' or 'maxims' as well:

Kant is of the same opinion as Sade. For in order to reach das Ding absolutely, to open the flood gates of desire, what does Sade show us on the horizon? In essence, pain. The other's pain as well as the pain of the subject himself, for on occasions they are simply one and the same thing. To the degree that it involves forcing an access to the Thing, the outer extremity of pleasure is unbearable to us (1959, p. 80).

The insight of pain linking Kant and Sade constitutes a turning point in Lacan's thinking about perversion. In order to go further, he needs a new concept, or at least a new use of a concept. It is the concept of that, which is unbearable to us, of the outer extremity of pleasure. It is the concept of *jouissance* that Lacan will mint anew in order to make sense of 'pleasure in pain'; or, maybe better: 'pain in pleasure'. As such, the study of perversion leads Lacan to the discovery of one of his most important concepts.

In the next paragraph, we will analyze how Lacan manipulates the concept of *jouissance* and splits it off from the idea of desire. The result paves the way for a more coherent

reading of masochism and sadism as a specific relationship to the beyond of pleasure, to jouissance, to the Thing.

In the next paragraph, we also focus on Lacan's reading of Kant's two apologues, practical examples that Kant invents to advance the case for his categorical imperative. Lacan will first give a straightforward reading of the apologues, which is followed by important developments on the concept of jouissance. After that, he will return to the apologues, and give a new reading, informed by what he gathered from focusing on jouissance. We will follow Lacan closely on this road.

## Kant's apologues

### *The two apologues: first reading*

Let us look now in detail, in the concrete, how for Kant the moral law determines our actions by *rejecting* all inclinations. The most visible examples of this determination are to be found in Kant's two apologues, which Lacan articulates twice in the course of Seminar VII (1959).<sup>184</sup> The first articulation is to be found in the context of a long discussion of sublimation (Lacan, 1959, pp. 108-110).

The apologues in question are two examples Kant gives in order to impress on us the influence of the weight of reason. Lacan describes this weight of reason as follows:

Alongside das Ding, however much we may hope that its weight will be felt on the good side, we find in opposition the Kantian formula of duty. That is another way of making one's weight felt. Kant invokes the universally applicable rule of conduct or, in other words, the weight of reason (1959, p. 108).

Where does one find this weight of the Thing, which Lacan puts here on a par with Kant's idea of 'duty' – which in turn is thought of as a corollary of reason? Like above, the answer is pain, the only 'pathos' accompanying the moral act:

I brought to your attention the passage on the theme of Schmerz, of pain, as a correlative of the ethical act [...] in order to impress upon us the influence of the weight of reason, Kant invents for his didactic purposes an example which is magnificent in its freshness. A double fable is involved that is designed to make us feel the weight of the ethical principle pure and simple, the potential dominance of duty as such against all, against all that is conceived as vitally desirable (1959, p. 108).

While Kant uses his apologues to highlight the precedence of duty over ‘the pathological’, of duty over pleasure, Lacan uses Kant’s apologues for his own ends. His aim is to show the difference between “the limits normally assigned to the pleasure principle in opposition to the reality principle given as a criterion” and the transgression beyond these limits (1959, p. 109); in other words: the difference between that what brings pleasure – that what is ‘vitally desirable’ – and that what the Thing brings.

The idea of ‘that what is vitally desirable’ is crucial here. One has to keep in mind that at this point in the Seminar, Lacan has not yet developed his conception of jouissance. Jouissance will be ‘that what the Thing brings’, that which is beyond pleasure. Lacan doesn’t name it yet, but has it clearly in his sights.

In order to develop this concept, Lacan needs something to oppose it to. In the rest of the Seminar, he opposes it, mainly, to desire. However, in this opposition, Lacan often seems to ‘force’ his own conception of desire. While desire was in Seminar VI (1958) a mature concept, connoting the lost object, here it is often – but not always – taken almost naïvely as ‘that what is vitally desirable’. This ‘bending’ of his own conception of desire is one of the main sources of confusion that the development of the concept jouissance brings with it.

But let us focus on the two examples. They appear in a particular context in Kant’s Critique, which we briefly sketch. Kant wants to tackle the following problem: “Supposing that a will is free: to find the law that alone is competent to determine it necessarily”:

Since the matter of a practical law, that is, an object of the maxim, can never be given otherwise than empirically whereas a free will, as independent of empirical

conditions (i.e., conditions belonging to the sensible world), must nevertheless be determinable, a free will must find a determining ground in the law but independently of the matter of the law (Kant, 2015, p. 26).

Kant concludes out of this that freedom and an unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other. But if this is so, which of the two comes first? Freedom, or the unconditional practical law?

Kant argues that freedom cannot come first, “since the first concept of it is negative” (Kant, 2015, p. 27). In other words, freedom is defined as the absence of something, of the possibility to determine one’s own actions. It cannot come from experience either, because experience only gives us knowledge of the merely phenomenal, while freedom is a noumenal idea. So, Kant’s reasoning runs, the unconditional practical law comes first. The question then becomes: how is the consciousness of that moral law possible? Kant’s answer is the following:

We can become aware of pure practical laws just as we are aware of pure theoretical principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them to us and to the setting aside of all empirical conditions to which reason directs us (Kant, 2015, p. 26).

Kant concludes that the concept of a pure will arises out of the pure practical laws, while the concept of a pure understanding arises out of the pure theoretical principles.

It is to illustrate this idea of the ethical autonomy of the noumenal subject, in other words its freedom in relation to its pathological inclinations, wishes or desires that Kant gives two scenarios, which we cite here unabridged:

Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and the opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply. But ask him whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture

to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him (Kant 2015, p. 27).

The point Lacan makes in relation to these examples is quite intricate. To explain it, we will first analyze Kant's reasoning in the two scenarios.

For Kant, what is common in both scenarios, are the alternative outcomes: to live or to die. His implicit question seems to be: what is worth dying for? His, equally implicit, answer seems to be that nobody would die for his pathological inclinations, his wishes, desires or pleasure; on the other hand, one could *possibly* consider to die for the sake of doing one's *duty*.

We schematize this as follows:

Scenario	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative chosen
1	To die for one's desire	To live and renounce one's desire	Always 2
2	To die for one's duty	To live and renounce one's duty	1 or 2

Table 7 Kant's first apologue

Kant's unwritten conclusion is the following: a 'phenomenal' desire to make love will never win over the fear for death, while the 'noumenal' duty to bear no false witness *could possibly* win over the love of life. The main point being the idea that this proves that the determination of the will can free itself from the phenomenal: one is *free* because it is *possible* to choose *duty* over *desire*.

It is possible, however, to analyze the scenarios in another way, when one sees – and Lacan does so, up to a certain point – as common to both scenarios not the idea that it is mainly about a choice between life or death, but that it is mainly about a choice between giving in to one's desire or renouncing one's desire. If read as such, another question formulates itself: which desire are we exactly talking about in the different alternatives of

the different scenarios? Is it about pleasure, about 'what is vitally desirable', or is it about desire for the object *a* as coined in Seminar VI (1958)?

This complicates the matter, because it is not straightforward about *which* desire we are speaking. In the first scenario, is it about the desire for 'the gratification of lust', about the desire 'to stay alive', or about a choice between these two desires? And in the second scenario, is it about the desire 'to do one's duty', or about the desire 'to stay alive'? Or is it even about the desire to obey the prince, or on the contrary, about the desire to disobey the prince? About the desire to see an honorable man killed, or the desire to save him? Or, to go further, between the desire to see an honorable man killed and the desire to die?

This is an altogether different way of presenting the alternatives. The main difference is that duty can be read as a form of desire in its own right, and that the palette of human desires is much vaster than what Kant dares to imagine. Lacan doesn't formulate it as such, but we read his reasoning as following this underlying logic.

The problem with this reasoning is, however, that it stretches the concept of desire. Not, as we indicated earlier, in the sense of desire becoming 'what is vitally desirable' – that stretch will come later, as we will show. The stretch here is, on the contrary, that towards *jouissance*: desire seems here to cover that, which Lacan will come, very shortly, to call *jouissance*.

But first things first; following the text, one sees that Lacan, immediately after giving a quite inaccurate and too brief rendition of the above cited passage in Kant, reacts as follows, formulating what is wrong with Kant's reasoning:

[Kant] misses something. It is after all not impossible that under certain conditions the subject of the first scenario will not so much offer himself up to be executed – at no point is the fable taken to this point – but will at least consider doing so (1959, p. 108).

So according to Lacan in the first scenario, one could easily imagine one choosing the first alternative: accepting to be hung in order to spend the night with the lady.

Lacan gives two possible motives for this choice (1959, p. 108). He calls the first one the 'possible overvaluation of the object', which is reminiscent of what Freud said about the part object in fetishism; Lacan develops it later in the Seminar as a type example of sublimation. The second possible motive is the focus of our doctoral dissertation, namely perversion.

The way Lacan deals with sublimation is interesting, but out of the scope of our study. Suffice it to say that the idea of creating out of nothing ('ex nihilo') is a formula for sublimation, and that Lacan alternatively defines it as "the transformation of an object into a Thing" (1959 p. 117), or the 'elevation' of something to the dignity of the Thing" (p. 112). To go short, sublimation is a way to keep desire going, to keep the Thing at bay.

We continue to follow the development of the second possible motive, perversion:

it is not impossible for a man to sleep with a woman knowing full well that he is to be bumped off on his way out, by the gallows or anything else (all this, of course, is located under the rubric of passionate excesses, a rubric that raises a lot of other questions); it is not impossible that this man coolly accepts such an eventuality on his leaving – for the pleasure of cutting up the lady concerned in small pieces, for example (1959, p. 109).

When Lacan speaks of two forms of transgression: excessive object sublimation (i.e. choosing to sleep with a woman, even if it costs one's life), or perversion (i.e. choosing to cut the woman in pieces, even if it costs one's life), we can ask: transgression of what? It looks like it is about the transgression of the *limits* that are normally assigned to the pleasure principle in opposition to the reality principle (1959, p. 109). In other words, what Kant does not see, or better: does not acknowledge, is the 'beyond' of the pleasure principle, i.e. the death drive.

But, we can ask: What is it actually that leads one to perversion or sublimation, to the beyond of the pleasure principle? Lacan's answer, already partly quoted above, is rather confusing:

Sublimation and perversion are both a certain relationship of desire that attracts our attention to the possibility of formulating, in the form of a question, a different criterion of another, or even of the same, morality, in opposition to the reality principle. For there is another register of morality that takes its direction from that which is to be found on the level of das Ding; it is the register that makes the subject hesitate when he is on the point of bearing false witness against das Ding, that is to say, the place of desire, whether it be perverse or sublimated (1959, pp. 109-110).

Here, Lacan is not very clear. When he calls sublimation and perversion specific relationships to desire, the question is, once more: Which desire? The Thing as 'place' of desire sounds rather odd. De Kesel's Kepler-like explanation of desire as attraction from a distance towards the Thing (see higher) is a more precise metaphor. The Thing is, as Lacan will later state, as object *a*, the *cause* of desire, not the locus of desire; it is rather the locus of the object *a*, the locus where desire becomes jouissance.

But how does that point towards 'another register of morality' that takes its direction 'from that which is to be found on the level of das Ding'? What kind of morality is this? Lacan speaks about 'bearing false witness against das Ding', against the place of desire, whether perverse or sublimated. What does he mean with 'bearing false witness against das Ding'?

When we read 'that what is found at the level of the Thing' as the object *a* as cause of desire, and keep in mind that desire is dependent on the distance with the object *a*, and see jouissance as what happens when this distance is transgressed, this passage becomes more legible.

Sublimation is here seen as a way of keeping a safe distance from the Thing, and thus keeping up desire, while perversion – at least in its momentary passages à l'acte – is a transgression of this distance, resulting in destructive jouissance.

But this reading is also problematic: it forces the way Lacan uses the concept desire in the quote (i.e. putting perverse desire and sublimated desire on the same level).



Secondly it doesn't answer the – unclear – question whether we should 'bear false witness against das Ding' or not.

This tentative reading leaves a lot of question marks; Lacan admits himself that "we are only stumbling along here" (1959, p. 110). It is no surprise that Lacan, in the course of his Seminar, first develops the concept of *jouissance*, and secondly comes back to the apologues to reread them.

### *The development of the concept Jouissance*

In the third part of the Seminar, titled "The paradox of *jouissance*" (1959, pp. 167-240) by Miller, the editor of the Seminar, Lacan returns to Kant's two examples. Before analyzing this interesting (re)elaboration, we briefly recall the development of the concept of *jouissance* in Lacan's work.<sup>185</sup> This will throw light on the way Lacan develops and uses this concept in Seminar VII (1959), and provides necessary context for reading his return to the two apologues by contrasting *jouissance* with desire.

Interestingly, the most precise definition Lacan has to offer is to be found just before the start of "The paradox of *jouissance*", while he discusses eroticism and techniques of 'holding back', in other words, foreplay:

from the point of view of the pleasure principle, the paradox of what might be called the effect of *Vorlust*, of foreplay, is precisely that it persists in opposition to the purposes of the pleasure principle. It is only insofar as the pleasure of desiring, or, more precisely, the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure, is sustained that we can speak of the sexual valorization of the preliminary stages of the act of love (1959, p. 152).

Lacan speaks here, in passing by, about the 'pleasure of experiencing unpleasure'; this little phrase is like a hinge for the whole Seminar, and refers to the question that drives the whole of Freud's work – and, as we claim, also the whole of Lacan's work – forwards: the question of the possibility of perversion, as exemplified in the enigma of masochism, formulated as: how can one find pleasure in pain, in unpleasure? In passing by, we

remark how this idea of 'pleasure in unpleasure' complicates the, at the first sight so simple, concept 'pleasure'. The question is paradoxical: is pleasure still pleasure when it is unpleasure? It is this complication that is responsible for the blurriness in the differentiation between the pleasure principle, the reality principle and their interrelation to *jouissance*.

But how does the concept '*jouissance*' develop? The root of the concept, as many other Lacanian concepts, is Freudian. Initially, *jouissance* is just Lacan's particular French translation of the German 'Genuss' (enjoyment, consumption, pleasure, indulgence) – the usual French translation would be 'plaisir' (pleasure, joy). Freud contrasts the term to 'Befriedigung' (satisfaction, gratification), which connotes a satisfaction at the level of the ego, while 'Genuss' designates for him satisfaction at the level of particular drives and wishes. In fact, this idea of satisfaction at the level of the drive, remains a key idea for Lacan's conception of *jouissance*, and allows one to differentiate it from desire.

From Seminars I (1953) and II (1954) onwards, Lacan starts to use the term sporadically, often in the context of discussions of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. *Jouissance* is then that what the master extracts from the objects the slave produces, for which the correct English translation would be usufruct (cf. Lacan, 1953, p. 223; 1954, p. 269).

In Seminar IV (1956), the term is used outside of the Hegelian context and in an everyday sense, to designate the enjoyable sensation that accompanies the satisfaction of biological needs such as hunger (p. 125).

At the time of Seminars IV and V (1956; 1957), the term acquires a sexual connotation. Lacan uses *jouissance* to refer to masturbation (1956, p. 241) in the fourth Seminar. In the fifth Seminar, Lacan promises that he will discuss *jouissance* as the *opposite* of desire (1957, p. 252), but he does not keep his promise. All he does is to vaguely indicate a direction the possible development of such a concept might take, and give a few

references to André Gide and Jean Genet. In 1958 he makes the sense of *jouissance* as orgasm explicit (1966, p. 727).

Closely related to the status of *jouissance* is the status of the object *a* as it figures in the phantasm. Before Seminar VII (1959), Lacan treats this object mostly merely as imaginary or symbolical – with the exception of the end of Seminar VI (1958), as we showed earlier, where it starts to be treated as real. *Jouissance* is than that what appears when the phantasm is actually (not merely imaginary or symbolically) – albeit necessarily momentarily – realized. At the same time, desire is what protects against *jouissance*.

As said, in the Seminar on ethics, before part III, “The paradox of *jouissance*” (1959, pp. 167-241), *jouissance* is mentioned only twice (p. 12; p. 61), but never as a theoretical concept. In part III, *jouissance* is firstly introduced in the context of a discussion of Freud’s myth of the murder of the primal father in “Totem and Taboo” (1912-1913).

*Jouissance* is there that what is prohibited by the primal father: access to the father’s women, in other words: incest. But even after the murder of the father, *jouissance* stays prohibited. In other words: it is impossible. However, the trespassing of the law is not impossible. But every trespassing of the law gives rise to guilt. In this sense, *jouissance* is intrinsically linked to the superego.

This makes Lacan claim that there is no access to *jouissance* without a transgression of the law (1959, p. 177). Where before, desire was always perverse, here *jouissance* is always the result of perverse transgression. Moreover, it is the function of the law to make incest desirable: it makes us believe that what is impossible – the finding back of the mythical lost object – really exists, that it is possible for us to encounter it again.

This leads Lacan to an interesting, but partly enigmatic metaphor, which dialectizes the relation between desire, *jouissance* and the law:

If the paths to *jouissance* have something in them that dies out, that tends to make them impassable, prohibition, if I may say so, becomes its all-terrain vehicle, its half-track truck, that gets it out of the circuitous routes that lead man back in a

roundabout way toward the rut of a short and well-trodden satisfaction [...] what we see here is the tight bond between desire and the Law (1959, p. 177).

It is, in other words, the prohibition of an impossible *jouissance* that creates desire – desire to attain that *jouissance*, here described as the ‘paths to *jouissance*’.<sup>186</sup>

The second moment of the introduction of *jouissance* turns around Freud’s “Civilisation and its Discontents” (1930a). In this text, Lacan sees Freud as claiming that *jouissance* is evil (1959, p. 184). As to the why, Lacan says: “it is suffering because it involves suffering for my neighbor” (1959, p. 184).

But what is this link between evil *jouissance* and my neighbor? Lacan explains by referring to Freud:

Those who like fairy stories turn a deaf ear to talk of man’s innate tendencies to “evil, aggression, destruction, and thus also to cruelty”. And Freud’s text goes on: “Man tries to satisfy his need for aggression at the expense of his neighbor, to exploit his work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to appropriate his goods, to humiliate him, to inflict suffering on him, to torture and kill him” (1959, p. 185).

Lacan adds, laconically: “If I hadn’t told you the title of the work from which this passage comes, I could have pretended it was from Sade (1959, p. 185).

What Lacan stresses here, is that Freud sees the ‘evil’ at the heart of the neighbor, of the other. It is the other’s *jouissance* that is evil; that what he perversely desires. As Lacan says, this points forward to Sade, which he’ll analyze in the next chapter.

But this doesn’t explain why *jouissance* involves suffering for the neighbor. It is, simply put, *our* *jouissance* that makes the neighbor suffer. In other words: just like our neighbor’s, *our own* *jouissance*, that what *we* perversely desire, is also evil, and it thus brings suffering for the other.

[When] Freud stops short in horror at the consequences of the commandment to love one’s neighbor, we see evoked the presence of that fundamental evil which dwells within this neighbor. But if that is the case, then it also dwells within me. And

what is more of a neighbor to me than this heart within which is that of my jouissance and which I don't dare go near? For as soon as I go near it, as Civilization and Its Discontents makes clear, there rises up the unfathomable aggressivity from which I flee, that I turn against me, and which in the very place of the vanished Law adds its weight to that which prevents me from crossing a certain frontier at the limit of the Thing (1959, p. 186).

It is in the confrontation with the jouissance of one's neighbor, that one meets one's own jouissance. This evil jouissance is at the very center of one's being. When one goes near it, one's aggressivity flares up – an unfathomable aggressivity that is reminiscent of Freud's sadistic drive. This aggressivity is turned 'against me' – remember Freud saw masochism initially as sadism 'turned around against oneself'. This 'masochistic' tendency takes the place of the law, Lacan claims. In which sense? In the sense that it 'takes over' the prohibition of incest. This law of the prohibition of incest 'has vanished', in the sense of what Lacan writes about 'Totem and Taboo' (Freud, 1912-1913): the primal father is dead, or, as Lacan often puts it, after Nietzsche's formula: God is dead. But the superego has 'internalized' this law, has 'internalized' the sadistic law of the primal father into the 'masochistic' law of the guilty subject. It is this that stops one from 'trespassing', from crossing the limit towards the Thing – to go to mythical locus where one could find jouissance.

We are here far removed from sadism and masochism as subjective structures. Nevertheless, the development of both as subjective structures relies heavily on this development of the relationship of the subject to jouissance.

This idea of jouissance in myself as in my neighbor puts, to say the least, the relationship with one's neighbor in another light. Lacan illustrates this pointedly with a comment on the tale of Saint Martin. When the relationship concerns 'goods', in other words, the common, exchangeable, cultural objects, the relation with the neighbor is simple and symmetrical – one could say: intersubjective, reciprocal: the neighbor's good is my good. That is why Lacan sees it as easy for Saint Martin to give away half of his cloak. But when the relationship with one's neighbor concerns jouissance, things are different. Lacan muses that the naked beggar's jouissance may lay elsewhere than where we see

his 'good': "But perhaps over and above that need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely, that Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him" (1959, p. 185).

This creates a wholly different kind of relationship, asymmetric, not reciprocal. As it concerns the other's 'Thing', the other's object *a*, there is no 'exchange' possible: one's jouissance is evil, deadly, and, most of all: unique, incommensurable, irrational: it is that what is desired, it is 'beyond' pleasure, it is perverse.

Lacan shows that this 'evil' is implicated by Freud already in his first notion of the pleasure principle – which he formulated as an unpleasure principle, as a principle of the least suffering – that it points to a certain 'beyond'. The pleasure principle itself, Lacan claims, has the function of keeping us at 'this side'. Pleasure, in that sense, keeps us at distance of jouissance: "Who is there who in the name of pleasure doesn't start to weaken when the first half-serious step is taken toward jouissance?" (p. 185). Pleasure – and the pleasure principle – are here seen as a defense against the jouissance the Thing brings.

Here, in the context of Freud's "Totem and Taboo" (1912-1913) and "Civilisation and its Discontents" (1930a), jouissance is presented as the desired 'impossible', 'unreachable' 'objectless', a desire that is *caused* by prohibition, by the law.

Further in the text, after his rereading of Kant's apologues and a confrontation with Sade's texts, Lacan refines the concept more, and links it – finally – to the object *a*. Lacan speaks about what happens when we meet something real at the site of the phantasm – to be more precise: at the site of that, what the phantasm should have protected us against. In other words, what happens when the desired jouissance realizes? Lacan answers: "My neighbor's body breaks into pieces":

When one approaches that central emptiness, which up to now has been the form in which access to jouissance has presented itself to us, my neighbor's body breaks into pieces. Proclaiming the law of jouissance as the foundation of some ideally Utopian social system, Sade expresses himself [...]: "Lend me the part of your body that will give me a moment of satisfaction and, if you care to, use for your own pleasure that part of my body which appeals to you" (p. 202).

All is in the formula: “lend me the part of your body...”: it is about the part object that appears when we enter the locus of jouissance, which Lacan before Seminar VII (1959) thought of as the empty center of the symbolic – and emptiness can only be symbolic; as Lacan always claimed: the Real is ‘plain’. It is the part that is not any more in relation to its whole – and in this sense, it is incommensurable, irrational, in that it has no common ‘ratio’, no common measure to its whole – it is a detached part, detached from the ‘total object’ (1959, p. 202). In this sense, jouissance is about a (partly) thing, which, moreover, is real, which is, to go short, the object *a* as instantiation of the Thing.<sup>187</sup> The phantasm, which subtends desire, is that what keeps the distance to Thing.

But it is the reading of Kant’s two apologues and Sade’s text that allows Lacan to link jouissance to an object – to the Thing, the object *a*.

#### *The two apologues: second reading*

Now, with the concept jouissance more clearly situated in the context of its development, we turn to Lacan’s rereading of Kant’s two apologues.

Our claim is that, while absent in Lacan’s text, two questions are nonetheless prominently present in the subtext: how is masochism possible, how is sadism possible? We invite our reader to read this paragraph with both questions in mind.

The digression on jouissance crucially allows Lacan, revisiting Kant’s first example, to reread the ‘pleasure’ he saw as involved in the scenario as ‘jouissance’. In the same movement, he characterizes it as implying the acceptance of death, thus linking it to the death drive:

The striking significance of the first example resides in the fact that the night spent with the lady is paradoxically presented to us as a pleasure that is weighed against a punishment to be undergone; it is an opposition which homogenizes them. There is in terms of pleasure a plus and a minus [...] it is important to note that one only has to make a conceptual shift and move the night spent with the lady from the category of pleasure to that of jouissance, given that jouissance implies precisely

the acceptance of death – and there's no need of sublimation – for the example to be ruined (1959, pp. 189-190).

This conceptual shift from desire to jouissance changes the first line of the table we gave above:

Scenario	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative chosen
1	To access jouissance (and die)	To renounce jouissance (and live)	1 OR 2

Table 8 Kant's first apologue reread through jouissance

In other words, reading the first apologue as a choice between jouissance or the renunciation of jouissance invalidates Kant's argument: both alternatives become possible choices. The result is that Kant's main point – the determination of our will can free itself from the phenomenal/pathological – is disproven: there *are* 'pathological' motives that can make somebody choose death: i.e. jouissance.

One *might* be free to choose duty over desire, but one is *not* free to choose duty over jouissance; jouissance can impose itself. This is, Lacan seems to claim, what makes perversion possible.

Lacan's rereading of the first apologue changes the view of the *source* of the moral law: it *does* come from the phenomenal, and so the noumenal status Kant assigned to it, is unmasked. Of course, it doesn't come *merely* from the phenomenal; it comes from the Real as 'embodied' in the phenomenal; from transgressing the frontier to the Thing, instantiated as object *a*. Kant's split between 'noumenal' and 'phenomenal' does not coincide neatly with Lacan's split between the real register on the one side and the symbolic and the imaginary registers on the other side – moreover, there is no such split in Lacan; the three registers are best thought of as interwoven.



Lacan concludes that the moral law is the *support* of jouissance – which is a lighter claim than what Lacan seemed to imply above: that the law is the *cause* of our desire for what brings jouissance:

it is enough for jouissance to be a form of evil, for the whole thing to change its character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed. Anyone can see that if the moral law is, in effect, capable of playing some role here, it is precisely as a support for the jouissance involved (1959, p. 189).

In other words: it is only because of the presence of the gallows that the lady becomes alluring. And that goes for both sides: the law is not just a support for jouissance; jouissance and the law are mutually supportive, as two sides of the same coin: one does not go without the other.

When Lacan revisits the second apologue, he goes further: “In the first case, pleasure and pain are presented as a single packet to take or leave, in consideration of which one avoids the risk and gives up jouissance. In the second case, there is pleasure or pain (p. 189).

Once again, it is not entirely clear what Lacan means. When he speaks of ‘pleasure and pain as a single package’ in the first example, he means that there are two alternatives: to accept both the pleasure of the night with the lady and the pain of the gallows, or to renounce both. Doing so, he seems to take a step back and to drop the concept of jouissance in his interpretation of the first apologue, and make it a question of weighing the sums of pleasure and pain in both alternatives. He does not seem to consider here the possibly perverse motivation, which involves the jouissance of the ‘passage à l’acte’ of cutting up the lady – and/or the jouissance of being cut up by the gallows. But then again, he only says that Kant *presents* the first alternative in that fashion.

But what does Lacan point to when he says that in the second case, the choice is purely between pleasure or pain? Lacan seems to consider ‘staying alive’ here as the pleasure

the first alternative brings, and ‘the immediate execution’ as the pain the second alternative brings – i.e. the pain that is correlated with following the moral law.

But Lacan continues and gives another twist to his rereading, destined to unmask the fact that Kant tries to delude us about what is really at stake in the choice of the alternatives. To follow him at least a little bit, we need to make sense of Lacan’s characterization of what he calls the ‘neighbor’, the ‘fellow man’.

Lacan stresses the fact that the ‘neighbor’ or the ‘fellow man’ is not only the (little) other – the image that keeps our ego together, or the other with whom we can exchange ‘goods’, like Saint Martin’s beggar that one can presumably simply clothe – but also as the Other, as what Chiesa (see higher) calls the ‘real Other’, in the sense of “the most intimate part of ourselves, our ‘Thing’, or the locus of our jouissance and of the specificity of jouissance in general” – the Other with his particular, opaque jouissance (Lacan, 1959, p. 202).<sup>188</sup>

This vision of the ‘neighbor’ – stemming, as seen above, from Freud’s “Civilisation and its Discontents” (1930a) – makes it easier to understand Lacan’s development of the first alternative in the second Kantian example, i.e. ‘bearing false witness’ with as a result that a ‘fellow man’ loses his life:

What’s at issue here? That I attack the rights of another who is my fellow man in that statement of the universal rule, or is it a question of the false witness as such? (Lacan, 1959, pp. 189-190)

First of all, it is not clear what Lacan aims at with ‘to attack the rights of my fellow man’ in ‘that statement of the universal rule’. But the translation is slightly imprecise; the French original says ‘the statement of the universal rule’, not ‘that statement’.<sup>189</sup> ‘That statement’ seems to point at a particular statement of the universal rule, while ‘the statement’ points to the universal rule in general.

With this in mind, we read the first part of the sentence as: the fellow man is, in the same way as we are, subject to the categorical imperative, is subjected to duty, to the moral law; by damaging our fellow man, we damage, we transgress the moral law.

The question becomes then: what is at issue? Damaging the moral law in general by damaging our fellow man, or transgressing a particular law? Besides, when it would be about a particular law, it is not immediately clear about which one: is it the law to speak the truth in general, or the law 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor'?

If damaging the moral law in general is what is at stake, then the choice is between damaging the moral law in general or losing one's life. If it is transgressing a particular moral law that is at stake, then the choice is between transgressing a particular moral law or losing one's life.

Here, the *jouissance* at stake in the example becomes more complex. Between the lines, Lacan seems to add two more layers. First, the idea that damaging one's fellow man – by causing him to be hung – equals a certain *jouissance*. Second, the idea that bearing false witness as such brings also a certain *jouissance*: the *jouissance* of transgressing the moral law, of damaging 'truth' itself. Both ideas point once more to the question of how sadism is possible. On the other hand, the whole of Seminar VII (1959) is interwoven with the idea that it is the obedience to the 'absolute' moral law – i.e. the superego – that brings *jouissance* – which points to the possibility of masochism.

Instead of providing a way out of this maze, Lacan complicates the matter still further: he proposes to change Kant's second example:

Let's talk about true witness, about a case of conscience which is raised if I am summoned to inform on my neighbor or my brother for activities which are prejudicial to the security of the state. That question is of a kind that shifts the emphasis placed on the universal rule (Lacan, 1959, p. 190).

Here, the alternatives become: speaking the truth, with has the consequence that a fellow man loses his life, or lying, with as a consequence that the security of the state is prejudiced.

In this changed second example, it seems that one is asked to weigh three things against each other: the precepts 'to tell the truth', 'not to prejudice the security of the state', and 'not to cause the death of a fellow man'. If either the first or the third precept weighs the most, one will choose the first alternative, while one chooses the second alternative only if the second precept weighs the most. In that way, the alternative one chooses, doesn't necessarily reveal where one puts one's 'moral' priorities. Or, maybe better put: it doesn't reveal whether one chooses for his *jouissance* – whatever that might be – or not.

Instead of expanding on this complication, Lacan immediately adds yet another layer, in which he suddenly includes himself and the context in which he is teaching:<sup>190</sup>

And I who stand here right now and bear witness to the idea that there is no law of the good except in evil and through evil, should I bear such witness? This Law makes my neighbor's *jouissance* the point on which, in bearing witness in this case, the meaning of my duty is balanced. Must I go toward my duty of truth insofar as it preserves the authentic place of my *jouissance*, even if it is empty? Or must I resign myself to this lie, which, by making me substitute forcefully the good for the principle of my *jouissance*, commands me to blow alternatively hot and cold? Either I refrain from betraying my neighbor so as to spare my fellow man or I shelter behind my fellow man so as to give up my *jouissance* (1959, p. 190).

We try to reformulate: Lacan, in front of his audience, claims that his inner conviction is that 'there is no law of the good except in evil and through evil' – in other words: that one must choose the 'Thing' over the 'good', i.e. one's *jouissance* over one's pleasure. He asks himself if he should teach his inner conviction in front of the audience. This 'law' that Lacan advocates, becomes his duty. It is here, in our opinion, that Lacan comes closest to a 'perverse' ethic, to an ethic of *jouissance*.<sup>191</sup>

But the next moment, he seems to take a step back, stops focusing on himself as a person, and starts speaking again about Kant's example. There, the neighbor is at stake: the fellow man against whom one is asked to testify falsely. It is not just the neighbor that is at stake, it is his *jouissance*. What this *jouissance* is, is far from clear.

In the next sentence ('Must I go toward my duty...'), it is as if both situations – Lacan as a person in front of his audience and Kant's second apologue – are mixed; the effect is that the sentence seems to concern 'What one should do in general' – or, at least, what a psychoanalyst should do in analysis. It is about a general duty to the 'truth', a duty to reveal the truth about *jouissance*, to bear witness of the idea that one must assume one's own, particular *jouissance*. Doing this, the authenticity of *jouissance* is preserved – even if it doesn't concern anything 'phenomenal'; even when its place is 'empty'.

Or, he asks himself, should he – and now, it is not clear any more if he is speaking about himself, about the protagonist in Kant's apology, about everyone, about the psychoanalyst or about himself – forego his duty, let go of his principle, betray his *jouissance* – and hence, *jouissance* in general?

Then, he seems, once more, to focus on Kant's apologue – but on the 'changed' version, where it is about giving 'true witness'. There, the result of betraying *jouissance* would, for the man who is asked to bear true witness against his fellow man, still force him to a choice between two alternatives. One possibility is to refuse to bear true witness, for the sake of a 'phenomenal' good: to spare the life of his fellow man. The other possibility is to bear this true witness, and give up on the life of his fellow man, in that way 'hiding' behind his fellow man, sacrificing him for the sake of another good, the security of the state. If he opts for the second possibility, he foregoes his *jouissance*, as he explicitly states. But the same goes for the first possibility; at least if he chooses it for the 'good', and not for the '*jouissance*' – unless, of course, it would be one's particular *jouissance* to bear true witness or to save the life of one's fellow man.

This is all very convoluted and complicated. Lacan, after this passage, seems to be in a total impasse. The basic questions seems to be: what is *jouissance* in relation to duty, to truth, to the Other, to desire. But in this passage, these questions are all blurred together and impossible to disentangle.

One can difficultly claim that *jouissance* is a finalized concept here, neither that it is clearly differentiated from desire, nor that Lacan gives a clear answer to the question that drives this Seminar: Which position should one take relative to one's particular *jouissance*?

On the other hand, Lacan's failing attempt to clarify the concept *jouissance* clearly foreshadow his later conceptual shift from desire to *jouissance* as that what one needs to preserve (Miller, 1996, pp. 422-427). The fact is that he ends up in contradictions and aporias – one of the main aporias being the idea of perversion: choosing to go without reserve for one's *jouissance* seems, at this moment of Lacan's teaching, at the same time ethical and perverse.

We are forced to conclude that Lacan's conceptual apparatus, in full development at the time of Seminar VII (1959), albeit driven by the question of the possibility of sadism and masochism, is not yet refined enough to deal with some aspects of the perverse position – most importantly with the link between perversion and *jouissance*. As we will show, Lacan's elaborations in Seminar X (1962), enable one to think perversion in a clearer way, one that does not directly equalizes it with the 'quest for *jouissance*', but articulates it with *jouissance*, the object *a* and the Other in a subtler, less confused fashion.

## Sadean concepts

We will address now some of Sade's concepts that are to be found in a rather dispersed fashion in Seminar VII (1959). They are dealt with by Lacan in a quite haphazard and unstructured way, but they come together later when he reworks them in "Kant with Sade" (1966). Studying these concepts in the context in which they originate provides us with some of the basic vectors that prepare for our lecture of the Sadean phantasm in "Kant with Sade" (1966) that we will address in the next part.

Here, we first focus on the concept of nature underlying Sade's thought system, as exemplified in what Sade calls "The system of Pope Pius VI" in "The Story of Juliette"

(1797). Then, we analyze the roles of the part object and of the indestructible victim. We conclude with a description of Lacan's view of jouissance as satisfaction of the drive and, linked to it, of perverse desire.

### *Sade's nature*

In the middle of a digression on the law, the death of God and the love for the neighbor, Lacan says that Sade "goes beyond the limit" (1959, p. 197), i.e. beyond the limit that keeps us at bay from the Thing, from jouissance and from the Real. Sade, however, does not go beyond the limit in his phantasms – which for Lacan explains the tedious character of these phantasms (1959, p. 197), but in the theoretical part of his work. As we will see later, in "Kant with Sade" (1966), Lacan will discern two Sadean phantasms: a 'conscious' one underlying his work, and an 'unconscious' one underlying his life (Miller, 1982, p. 28). In two important paragraphs, Lacan provides a very concise summary of Sade's theories as they are interspersed in his writing, focusing on the nature philosophy underlying Sade's theory:

Sade lays out a vision of Nature as a vast system of attraction and repulsion of evil by evil. Under these circumstances the ethical stance consists in realizing to the most extreme point this assimilation to absolute evil, as a consequence of which its integration into a fundamentally wicked nature will be realized in a kind of inverted harmony (1959, p. 197).

Lacan underscores here how Sade proclaims the jouissance of destruction, the virtue of crime, the quest for evil for evil's sake. At the bottom of Sade's theories, Lacan finds a deified nature that Sade calls the Supreme-Being-in-Evil. This name for nature appears in what Sade calls the 'System of Pius VI', the Pope who is introduced by Saint Fond, one of the more sinister characters in "The Story of Juliette" (1797, pp. 369-370; pp. 771-772).<sup>192</sup>

The argument is, briefly put, that by committing crimes, man does the work of nature, putting himself in her service. And nature, according to Sade, wants only one thing: annihilation. But to truly obey the Supreme-Being-in-Evil, or nature, the annihilation of life itself is not enough, because the constituent parts (or 'atoms') that life is made out of,

could recombine to form new life. Sade goes as far as wishing to prevent this regeneration. Lacan summarizes as follows:

Nature wants atrocities and magnitude in crimes; the more our destructions are of this type, the more they will be agreeable to it. To be of even greater service to nature, one should seek to prevent the regeneration of the body that we bury. Murder only takes the first life of the individual whom we strike down; we should also seek to take his second life, if we are to be even more useful to nature. For nature wants annihilation; it is beyond our capacity to achieve the scale of destruction it desires (1959, p. 210).

Lacan coins this 'meta-destruction' the 'second death'. He situates it at the border between Freud's nirvana-principle and Freud's death drive. One sees the Thing emerge here, showing its darkest side in the form of a blind, destructive nature. Moreover, we see Sade's heros here as figures acting in the name of such a nature, which can be read as the Real. In its aspect of law-giving instance, we interpret Sade's idea of nature as the real aspect of the big Other. And it is precisely, as we will see in our section on Seminar X (1962), one of the characteristics of the perverse subject structure to speak and act in the name of the Other. This point in itself, we hope, makes our detour through Seminar VII (1959) worth its while. Without it, the idea, so crucial in Lacan's interpretation of sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962), of the pervert seeking to occupy the place of the Other's instrument, would seem to appear out of the blue.

In the wake of his digression on Sade's nature philosophy, Lacan points out two more concepts Sade holds an interesting key to: the 'indestructible character of the sadist's victim' and the 'part object'.

### *My neighbor's body breaks into pieces*

In a passage we already quoted above, Lacan points to a certain central emptiness in Sade's work; he sees it brought about by the endless and empty summation of atrocities interspersed with complicated, often contradicting theoretical arguments promoting them:



When one approaches that central emptiness, which up to now has been the form in which access to jouissance has presented itself to us, my neighbor's body breaks into pieces. Proclaiming the law of jouissance as the foundation of some ideally Utopian social system, Sade expresses himself [...]: 'Lend me the part of your body that will give me a moment of satisfaction and, if you care to, use for your own pleasure that part of my body which appeals to you' 1959, p. 202).

This Sadean 'maxim', albeit in a thoroughly reformulated version, will be one of the central points in "Kant with Sade" (1966). Sade speaks here about the *part* of the body that gives satisfaction, but also about my *neighbor's* body breaking to pieces. It is not difficult to recognize here the part object, the aim of perverse desire. We see the object *a* appear here in its most literal sense: as a detachable part of the body that promises – and at the same time bars – access to jouissance.

As such, this passage foreshadows the development of the object *a* in Lacan's oeuvre. Where in Seminar VII (1959), the object *a* is presented to us as the Thing, massive and absolute, in Seminar X (1962), the stress will be put on the object *a* as part object and as cause of desire.<sup>193</sup>

But there is something else that is crucial in this quote. When Lacan speaks about 'central emptiness' as access to jouissance, he redefines the concept of jouissance. As said above, while in Seminars V (1957) and VI (1958) the term has imaginary and symbolic connotations, here it clearly refers to something real.<sup>194</sup> We recall that Lacan in Seminar VI held that desire tended to an empty center, while here, he finds clearly something real in this center – which, one could argue, comes down to the same. The difference is that the Real in the center is now 'covered over' by the object as detachable, the object *a*.

### *The indestructible victim in ourselves*

Lacan focuses the reader's attention on the fact that, whatever terrible ordeals the victims in Sade's scenarios have to suffer, the next morning, they always appear fresh and in one piece at the breakfast table (1959, p. 260-261). But there is more: the victims are not only

absolutely invulnerable, like Tom and Jerry in the famous cartoon; they are in general, female, young, virtuous and stereotypically beautiful:

The second term that Sade teaches us concerns that which appears in the phantasms as the indestructible character of the Other, and emerges in the figure of his victim [...] the victim survives the worst of her ordeals, and she doesn't even suffer in her sensual power of attraction [...] It seems that whatever happens to the subject is incapable of spoiling the image in question, incapable even of wearing it out (1959, p. 202).

There is a lot of material in this quote: the victim doesn't only stay intact, he or she is also characterized as an image. This imaginary character is, of course, reminiscent of the fetish; the victim is here portrayed as a screen memory, as a shiny but petrified image with the character of a symbol – somewhere between the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Remark as well that Lacan puts here the victim at the same time in the place of the Other, a fact that will be important in our analysis of the Sadean phantasm.

Lacan continues by extending the equivalence of the victim and the Other with the *neighbor*. As shown above, Lacan speaks of the neighbor as the most intimate part of ourselves, our 'Thing' (1959, p. 202). Once more, Lacan draws attention to the equivalence between the Thing and the Other – in its real aspect.

Another way to put this idea of the Thing in the Other as in ourselves, is to say that the subject deduplicates:

Analysis shows clearly that the subject separates out a double of himself who is made inaccessible to destruction, so as to make it support what, borrowing a term from the realm of aesthetics, one cannot help calling the play of pain (1959, p. 261).

This will also be instrumental in understanding the Sadean phantasm. By changing the Other into a petrified, indestructible image of ourselves, Sade is able to disavow the lack in the Other, and in that way the lack in ourselves. Which is, as we described in the part on fetishism, the underlying mechanism of perversion. This probably is what Lacan

means when stating that Sade “locates in the phantasm the content of the most intimate part of himself, which we have called the neighbour, or in other words the metipsemus?”; it is this that characterizes “a certain relationship to the Other, that we call Sadistic” (1959, p. 203).

### *Jouissance as satisfaction of the drive*

Lacan’s focus on Sade and his references to Nature, the part object and the Other, allows him to speak about jouissance in a more profound way. To begin with, it allows him to characterize jouissance as the satisfaction of the death drive (1959 p. 209), which comes close to Freud’s concept ‘Genuss’ as satisfaction of a particular drive, as mentioned earlier.

While the drive is a problematic concept in Lacan, one thing is clear: the drive is not the instinct. It has nothing to do with the biological, it is cultural. That is why Lacan insists that the drive belongs to the level of the signifier. He characterizes it as something that refers back to something memorable *because* it was remembered (1959, p. 209). But the death drive does not only belong to the level of the signifier, it is as well a *drive*. More specifically: it is a direct drive for destruction, that Lacan even describes as a *will* to destruction (p. 212).

In the next quote, Lacan puts it slightly differently, referring back to Freud, and alluding to Sade’s second death, as not only a will to destroy, but also as a will to begin anew:

Freud’s thought in this matter requires that what is involved be articulated as a destruction drive, given that it challenges everything that exists. But it is also a will to create from zero, a will to begin again. This dimension is introduced as soon as the historical chain is isolated, and the history presents itself as something memorable and memorized in the Freudian sense, namely, something that is registered in the signifying chain and dependent on its existence. That’s what I am illustrating by quoting the passage from Sade [...] Freud’s notion of the death drive is [...] of the same order as Sade’s Pope Pius VI (1959, p. 251).

In other words: in order to begin again, the death drive strives to undo what is inscribed. We see the parallel with perversion in the idea of unmarking the fundamental mark, or unbarring the barred subject (i.e. turning \$ into S), as we called it in the chapter on fetishism, of going back to the moment before the truth of our lack was revealed in the form of the missing female phallus, of undoing castration. Or, as Lacan puts it, once more, differently: “Without the signifier at the beginning, it is impossible for the drive to be articulated as historical” (p. 213). That is why perversion is a-historical, and why the pervert always has to start anew, hence the endless repetition of Sade’s scenarios.

No wonder then that Lacan speaks of ‘the field of the Thing’ – a field he discovers in this Seminar – in terms of what is at the origin or beyond the signifying chain, which is reminiscent of his use of the concept of the veil in Seminar IV (1956), as we described in the section on fetishism: “This field that I call the field of the Thing, this field onto which is projected something beyond, something at the point of origin of the signifying chain” (1959, p. 214).

This is important: the Thing is not only the *beyond*, it is at the same time the *origin* of the signifying chain – the chain that splits the subject. As such, the Thing can be read as a stage in Lacan’s ongoing attempt to decontextualize, to abstract Freud’s notion of the lost object of the first satisfaction, which will develop into the more stable notion of the object *a*, which is more suited to think perversion than the Thing is, because, while the Thing is only lack, the object *a* is at the same time lack and what covers over lack.

### *Perverse desire*

Lacan, describing the feeling that reading Sade provokes, says that the things Sade speaks about, are as if wrapped in an injunction not to think about them. He clearly means: for the neurotic subject. This description allows to point out one of the differences between the neurotic and the perverse subject structures:

One doesn’t have to read very far for this collection of horrors to engender incredulity and disgust in us, and it is only fleetingly, in a brief flash, that such

images may cause something strange to vibrate in us which we call perverse desire, insofar as the darker side of natural Eros enters into it (1959, p. 232).

This 'perverse desire' is here, of course, the perverse desire of neurotics. It is us neurotics who shrink back before the Thing, even before *thinking* about the Thing. Approaching the Thing, our desire peters out:

In the end, any imaginary or indeed real relationship to the research appropriate to perverse desire only suggests the incapacity of natural desire, of the natural desire of the senses, to go very far in this direction (1959, p. 232).

For the subject in perversion, it is different. Since the subject in perversion disavows the castration threat, or, better, more abstract: since he disavows lack – in himself as in the Other –, the encounter with this lack – with the Thing – doesn't make him shrink back – at first sight. For the subject in perversion, disgust and shame are not operational – at least not consciously.

However, as we will show later, even in the subject in perversion, this access to the Thing is only *momentary*, in a *passage à l'acte*. And in the *passage à l'acte*, the subject in perversion disappears or 'fades', leaving only the body in its real aspect as a limit to jouissance.

While discussing the function of beauty in the phantasm, a bit further in the text, Lacan finally mentions perverse masochism, although only, unfortunately, in passing by:

If there is "a good that mustn't be touched," as I was saying earlier, the phantasm is "a beauty that mustn't be touched," in the structure of this enigmatic field. The first side of this field is known to us, it is the side that along with the pleasure principle prevents us from entering it, the side of pain. We must ask ourselves what it is that constitutes that field. The death drive, says Freud, primary masochism. But isn't that to take too big a leap? Is the pain that denies access to the side the whole content of the field? Are all those who express demands for this field masochists after all? And I can tell you right off, I don't think (1959, p. 239).

Here, Lacan differentiates between masochism as a perverse subject structure and masochistic traits in neurotic subjects, that what Freud calls 'moral masochism'. Then,

Lacan goes on to describe an interesting trait of masochism as a part of the perverse subject structure:

the point aimed at by the position of the perverse masochist is the desire to reduce himself to this nothing that is the good, to this thing that is treated like an object, to this slave whom one trades back and forth and whom one shares (1959, p. 239).

Lacan closes this interesting parenthesis rather brutally, without further development. We want to stress the fact that the subject in masochism strives to put himself in the position of a common object, is not in view of deriving jouissance from being in this position, but *with an altogether different aim*, notably with the aim to 'provoke' an Other without lack, the central idea that Lacan develops further in the Seminar on anxiety (1962). Where in this brief passage in Seminar VII (1959), he describes the subject in masochism in the object-position in isolation, in Seminar X (1962) he will connect this position to the relationship of the subject in masochism to the Other and to the object *a*.

## Conclusion

After a basic recall of Kant's main lines in his second critique, we showed how Lacan stresses Kant's 'radicalism', which culminates in the idea that the 'moral is the real' and vice versa, linking two of Kant's and Lacan's most important concepts.

This link allows Lacan to add flesh to his characterization of the Thing: it is extimate, is like the real Other, and has a particular moral status: it does 'good' when it is kept at a right distance, but it can be 'evil' when this distance is transgressed. What happens then, is jouissance, which is seen initially as 'impossible', further in the text as 'evil'. In jouissance, the subject disappears, while the body suffers. As Lacan will make clear in Seminar X (1962), it is the subject in perversion that aims at transgressing the distance that separates us from the jouissance that reaching the Thing promises.

In the wake of Kant, Lacan can claim that the Thing, just like Kant's 'voice of conscious', makes the law; in that sense, it is like the 'cruel' superego. This allows Lacan to characterize the Thing at the same time as the motor, the cause of desire, which is

always desire for the Thing of the neighbor. It is there from the origin, is separated off from the subject like a part object, and it founds the possibility of speech. As such, it is the origin of the subject's split.

The contours of the Thing gain clarity; it becomes clearly that what Lacan called and will call the object *a*. Almost in passing by, the phantasm is characterized as the symbolic union between the split subject and the Thing, as that what keeps the Thing bay and thus as that what props up desire. In other words: desire is thought of as always having a relation to the Thing; in other words: desire is always perverse. But, while Lacan's development of the Thing as object *a* is a successful and necessary step in his development of a consistent theory on perversion, as will be clear in Seminar X (1962), his development of jouissance is more problematic. The aporias resulting from Lacan's reading of Sade's "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795) and of Kant's apoloques make that more than clear.

In his reading of Sade, and of what he calls the 'Sadean maxim', Lacan draws the parallel with Kant: both authors build an ethics on the basis of a pure formalization, on the abstraction of the 'pathological'. The only 'pathos' that is left for a rational, moral being, according to both authors, is pain. This makes Lacan claim that a rational ethics is a perverse ethics, in which the subject is at the service of the Other's jouissance: the voice of conscience in Kant's case, the promulgator of the law in Sade's case. While Kant sees the voice of conscience as part of the subject, and thus the subject as unsplit, Sade is more 'truthful': by showing that that which commands our actions, comes from outside, from the Other, he reveals the split in the subject. As we will show in our study of "Kant with Sade" (1966), it is exactly this split that the subject of sadism wants to undo.

In the graph of the Sadean phantasm, one of the key moments of "Kant with Sade" (1966), the most important concepts we studied in this section on Seminar VII (1959), will come together. The study of this text will allow us to understand the subject in perversion as a split subject striving for its reconstitution, through an alienation of its pathos and at the cost of being the instrument of the jouissance of the Other. In Seminar VII (1959), the groundwork for "Kant with Sade" (1966) is merely prepared. In that sense, this section was a necessary detour.





## PART 6

Lacan on sadism and masochism in Kant with Sade:  
taking the position of the object *a*

## Introduction

In this part we study Lacan's text "Kant with Sade" (1966).<sup>195</sup> All commentators on "Kant with Sade" (1966) agree on one thing: it is a very difficult and dense text, with many obscure passages. It is probably Lacan's most difficult published text.<sup>196</sup>

Whether the text deals directly with perversion is open for debate. The kernel of the Sadean phantasm, the key point of the text, can be summarized with the matheme ( $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ). This matheme is clearly prefigured in Seminar VI (1958), where Lacan speaks of the subject and the object trading places in the perverse phantasm compared to the neurotic phantasm, which is written as ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ). Moreover, in Seminar X (1962), Lacan explicitly deals with the phantasm of the subject in sadism and presents a schema (1962, p. 92) that is almost exactly the same as the schema of the Sadean phantasm presented here. In our opinion, this is sufficient evidence to claim that the Sadean phantasm is the phantasm of the subject in perversion. Miller claims quite clearly the same (1996, pp. 212-213; 1982, p. 82; pp. 88-89), as does Fink (2014, pp. 114-116).

Other authors claim that the Sadean phantasm merely represents the phantasm of the libertines that figure in Sade's writing, without drawing the consequences for Lacan's theory on perversion (Nobus, n. d., pp. 14-15); that "Kant with Sade" (1966) is not about the perverse structure (Fukuda, 2011, p. 3); still others are indifferent to its link with perversion (Baas, 1987).

The material for "Kant with Sade" (1966) comes for a large part directly from Seminar VII (1959). The most important moments from that Seminar are, firstly, the introduction of the concepts the Thing – which we read as a figuration of the object  $a$  – and jouissance, and secondly, the reading of Kant's second Critique and of Sade's "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795). As such, without a thorough understanding of Seminar VII (1959), it is impossible to understand "Kant with Sade" (1966). We refer to our former section.

However, the text also bears witness to the evolution in Lacan's thinking since Seminar VII (1959). The advances his theory has made, are often visible in "Kant with Sade" (1966). In order to differentiate the ideas that stem from Seminar VII (1959) and these that reflect his advances since, it is important to realize that the text was originally intended to be published as an introduction for the complete works of Sade, but was refused by the editor.<sup>197</sup> Following the refusal, Lacan published a first version of "Kant with Sade" (1966) in the journal *Critique* (1963). He dated it September 1962. When in 1966, his *Ecrits* were published, it incorporated a new version of the article, with some passages extensively rewritten. In the subsequent editions of the *Ecrits*, a few minor corrections and changes were added.

Between Seminar VII (1959) and the publication of the first version in 1963, Lacan held two more Seminars: Seminar VIII, "Transference" (1960) and Seminar IX, "Identification" (1961), and he was preparing the Seminar on Anxiety (1962).

As discussed previously, in Seminar VII (1959), Lacan doesn't mention the object *a* – apart from one brief mention of the 'a elements' (1959, p. 99). It is however, figured as the Thing, the main concept of the Seminar. In Seminars VIII (1960) and IX (1961) however, the object *a* is very much present.

In Seminar VIII (1960), the object *a* is articulated with the *agalma*, discussed in the context of transference, as the object of desire we seek in the other. It is as if Lacan takes a step back in this Seminar, and sees the object *a* once again as imaginary. However, towards the end of the Seminar, Lacan links the object *a* to the part object, and speaks of "the first forms of the object, qua separated" (1960, pp 331-332). Lacan names the oral object, the anal object, the phallus, but also that what is missing in the image, prefiguring the gaze as object *a*. This conception of the object *a* as that what is separated, lacking, but still constitutive, is the building ground for the ulterior development of the concept. This is an important evolution since Seminar VII (1959), and it is crucial to approach "Kant with Sade" (1966) with this evolution in mind.

In Seminar IX (1961), the object *a* is mostly thought of as the object of desire, with a focus on its non-specularizable aspect. It is articulated with the unary trait, and pictured as the object of castration. It is also related to the Other, and seen as “the effect of the impossibility of the Other to respond to demand” (1961, p. 162).

In the Seminar on Anxiety (1962), the object *a* is the main focus. It is in this Seminar that the object *a*, articulated with the concept of anxiety, becomes truly the object cause of desire, and at the same time truly the part object, which possible instances are the breast, the feces, the phallus, the gaze and the voice.<sup>198</sup>

Lacan’s trajectory between Seminars VII (1959) and X is the reason why one sees the object *a* appear in “Kant with Sade” (1966), while it was absent – or, to be more precise: obscured or replaced by the Thing – in Seminar VII (1959).

As we already dealt with Seminar VII (1959), we will concentrate here on the new developments that Lacan includes in “Kant with Sade” (1966).

“Kant with Sade” (1966) falls apart in four parts (Miller, 1996, p. 225). The first part (pp. 645-653, covering paragraphs 1 till 4) focuses on a discussion of a parallel between Kant and Sade, and the idea that Sade completes Kant’s analysis of the Categorical Imperative. Secondly (pp. 653-658, covering paragraphs 5 till 9), Lacan focuses on some considerations on Sade, in two parts, with two schemas. Follows thirdly (pp. 658-664, covering paragraphs 10 till 13) a more diffuse and general part of text, concerning phantasm, law, desire and the position of psychoanalysis. The fourth and final part deals with an assessment of Sade’s position in life (pp. 664-667), covering the last paragraph.

The two key moments of “Kant with Sade” (1966) are to be found in the second part: the discussion of the Sadean maxim and the graph of the Sadean phantasm. We will close-read both passages in detail.

Lacan's formulation and analysis of the Sadean maxim lay the groundwork for his later development of the relationship between the subject in perversion and the Other, and for the interpretation of the relationship between the subject and the Other in general. While the Sadean maxim was already present in Seminar VII (1959), in "Kant with Sade" (1966), the focus changes. While in Seminar VII (1959), Lacan stressed the 'kantianity' of the maxim, in "Kant with Sade" (1966) he examines how the maxim finds its perverse origin in the Other. For this goal, Lacan uses an array of rich notions, ideas and concepts that we examine in detail: the non-reciprocity of intersubjectivity, the kerygma or proclamation of the maxim, pain as a means to the jouissance of the subject in sadism and, finally, the status of the object of the law. For the study of perversion, the most important notion is certainly that the subject in perversion aims at the Other's jouissance, not in the least because it comes close to Lacan's more elaborated theory on perversion in Seminar X (1962).

The Sadean maxim paves the way for Lacan's schema of the Sadean phantasm, which is built around the kernel ( $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ), a turning-around of the neurotic phantasm, an idea that is, as we showed, already present in Seminar VI (1958). We analyze its structure, its form and its constituent parts in detail, and comment on Lacan's use of the notions 'cause' and 'vel', and on his articulation of the barred and the unbarred subject, and of the complete and the incomplete Other. The most interesting result of this analysis is that it enables us to understand the subject in perversion as a split subject striving for its reconstitution, through an alienation of its pathos and at the cost of being the instrument of the jouissance of the Other.

The clarification of the relation between the subject in perversion and its Other that we distill out of "Kant with Sade" (1966), is far from perfect. Firstly, masochism is out of the picture and sadism as a subject structure is not even treated directly. Secondly, the relation between the lack of the subject and of the Other stays opaque. In Seminar X (1962), the relationship between the subject in perversion and its Other will find a more stable form. The stress will be put on the lack of the subject in perversion with which it

strives to complete the Other and, last but not least, the Sadean phantasm will be generalized to sadism and masochism, which will be shown to be structurally alike.

But before turning to the Sadean maxim and phantasm, the most important moments of “Kant with Sade” (1966) from our perspective, we focus briefly on what is for Lacan the main point of the text: his claim that Sade delivers us the ‘truth’ of Kant.

### Sade as the truth of Kant

The first part of the text, the discussion of the parallel between Kant and Sade (1966, pp. 645-652), covering paragraphs 1 till 4, consists of an introductory paragraph and three main logical steps. In the introductory paragraph, Lacan promises to show how Sade completes, gives the truth of Kant. In paragraph 2, the first logical step, Lacan recapitulates and elaborates his close-reading of some parts of Kant’s second critique in Seminar VII (1959). He highlights that Kant makes the moral law formal, without object, without sentiment, and provides criteria to determine if a given law is moral. The test to determine if a given act is moral is to verify if one can want this act to be able to be formalized into a universal law. Kant finds the source of this law in consciousness, ‘the voice within’. In paragraph 3, the second logical step, Lacan recapitulates his close-reading of Sade’s pamphlet “Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become republicans”, to be found in his “Philosophy of the Bedroom” (2004). It is here that Lacan reformulates what he sees as Sade’s central maxim.

Lacan submits Sade’s maxim to Kant’s test, and claims that it holds, that it is universalizable. However, Lacan points to a main difference between Kant and Sade. In Kant, it is the *subject* who imposes the moral law to himself. The source of this imposition is what Kant calls ‘the voice of conscience’. In Sade, the law seems to be imposed by the Other and *to* the Other, not by the subject *to* the subject. This ‘return by the Other’ shows the splitting of the subject. As Miller recursively puts it in his analysis of “Kant with Sade” (1966), the subject is “split between the Other and the subject” (1996, p. 235). This

imposition by the Other makes Lacan claim that Sade's maxim is more honest and gives the 'truth' of the Kantian maxim, which masks the split by appealing to this 'internal voice'. We will comment on Miller's interpretation later on.

In paragraph four, the third logical step, Lacan focuses on what Kant and Sade have to say about the object of the law, the Other and *jouissance*.

Before analyzing the Sadean maxim, we will make a remark about the maxim Lacan compares it to: Kant's Categorical Imperative. After focusing on the Sadean maxim, we will turn our attention to the Lacanian concepts law, the Other and *jouissance*.

### A remark on Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant's Categorical Imperative – in its first formulation – famously says: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law" (Kant, 1785, p. 37).

This formula is generally known as the Formula for the Universal Law of Nature — remark the importance of the term Nature here. Kant states it also slightly differently: "So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature" (Kant, 1785, p. 38).

This first formulation is, in both of its statements, as already argued in our previous section, empty, content-less, not linked to the phenomenal. Kant gives, however, two more formulations of the Categorical Imperative, of which only the first is of importance to our argument.

This second formulation is known as the Formula of Humanity. Kant reasons that, because the moral law is necessary and universal, its motivating ground must have absolute worth, must be an end in itself. Kant finds this end in itself in rational beings: "the human being, and in general every rational being, exists as end in itself, not merely as means to the discretionary use of this or that will" (1785, p. 45). That is how Kant

arrives at the second formulation of the categorical imperative: “Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means” (Kant, 1785, p. 47).

In this formulation, the Categorical Imperative is not devoid of content. On the contrary: it finds its content in the idea of treating rational beings always as ends in themselves.

The content of the formula of humanity is almost the exact opposite of what Lacan formulates as the Sadean maxim (see further). While Kant stresses the fact that no-one may use anyone merely as a means, in the Sadean maxim, everyone will have the right to enjoy the other as one sees fit.

Lacan, as an averted reader of Kant, certainly knew this formulation, but chooses not to refer to it. This absence is enlightening: citing the Formula of Humanity would have undermined Lacan’s argument, the crux of which is that Sade’s maxim is acceptable as a Categorical Imperative because it is also devoid of content, and as such purely formally universalizable.<sup>199</sup>

While Lacan’s choice to omit to refer to the Formula of Humanity is not material to our main argument, it is however illustrative of how Lacan ‘uses’ or ‘bends’ Kant in order to make his point. In that sense, it is indicative of Lacan’s relation to his sources.

For Lacan’s analysis of the Categorical Imperative, we refer to the section of our doctoral thesis on Seminar VII (1959).

### Analysis of the Sadean maxim

In the third paragraph of the first part of “Kant with Sade” (1966, pp. 648-652), Lacan analyses what he calls Sade’s maxim. His analysis lays the groundwork for his later development of the relationship between the subject in perversion and the Other, and for



the interpretation of the relationship between the subject and the Other in general. It is also instrumental in preparing the ground for his schema of the Sadean phantasm, which we will study afterwards.

### *Different formulations of the maxim*

The Sadean maxim comes in four different versions. The first version is to be found in Seminar VII (1959) – where Lacan actually calls it a ‘law’, not a ‘maxim’. There, as stated earlier, it appears in the context of a short analysis of the pamphlet “Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you want to be republicans”, a fragment of “Philosophy in the Bedroom” (Sade, 1795) and is presented by Lacan as the essence of that pamphlet, as “something that in the last instance may be articulated as follows”:

- (1) Let us take as the universal maxim of our conduct the right to enjoy any other person whatsoever as the instrument of our pleasure (1959, p. 79).

Further in the Seminar, where Lacan calls it the “formulation of the fundamental law”, Lacan cites it as follows, explicitly stating that it comes from Sade’s “Juliette” (1797), where it is indeed to be found:<sup>200</sup>

- (2) Lend me the part of your body that will give me a moment of satisfaction and, if you care to, use for your own pleasure that part of my body which appeals to you (1959 p. 202).

In the Critique version of “Kant with Sade” (1963), Lacan presents what he now explicitly calls the Sadean maxim as if it came straight from Sade’s “Philosophy in the Bedroom” (1795), where it is not to be found. In other words, while it is quite close to what we find in “Juliette” (1797), its exact formulation is in fact Lacan’s own creation, his interpretation of what he sees as subtending the whole of Sade’s writing:<sup>201</sup>

- (3) I have the right to enjoy your body, I could say to whoever I like, and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body. (1963, p. 294).<sup>202</sup>

In the Ecrits version (1966), one finds the maxim slightly rewritten:

- (4) I have the right to enjoy your body, anyone can say to me, and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body (1966, pp. 768-769).<sup>203</sup>

Between these four formulations, the stress Lacan puts, gradually change.

In the first formulation of Seminar VII (1959), the stress lies on the fact that the Sadean maxim is structurally similar to and withstands the test of Kant's Categorical Imperative, i.e. that it is logically universalizable. Indicative of this is the fact that Lacan uses the terms 'universal maxim', 'right' and 'instrument': they all point to Kant's formulation. It also stresses the Sadean subject's claim to have the 'right to enjoy'.

In the second rendering in Seminar VII (1959), the focus shifts toward the notions of reciprocity and exchange — as witnessed to by the terms 'lend me... your' and 'use... mine' — and toward the part object, as in 'the part of your body' and 'whatever part of mine'.

In the Critique version (1963), the stress shifts to the specific jouissance that is characteristic for the perverse subject structure. The main indicator of this is that while in Seminar VII (1959), Lacan uses the terms satisfaction, pleasure and enjoyment in an undifferentiated fashion, at the time of the writing of the critique version, he uses the term jouissance in his comments on the maxim as a more elaborated concept to describe an enjoyment beyond pleasure. The other terms Lacan uses to formulate the Sadean maxim in this version of "Kant with Sade" (1963) are also more precise: he stresses the fact that the right is without limit, the 'capriciousness', the fact that it is not about mere demands, but about 'exactions' — words with connotations of severity, boundlessness and injustice.

In the final version of the Ecrits (1966), the main shift is towards non-reciprocity, a notion that we will detail further on. The crux of this shift is that "I could say to whoever I like" is

changed into “anyone can say to me”. Toscano (2009, pp. 88-89) interprets this as witnessing to a shift in Lacan’s interest from sadism to masochism between 1962 and 1966. The basis of Toscano’s claim seems to be that Lacan changes the underlying idea of the maxim from ‘I have the right to abuse anyone’ to ‘Everyone has the right to abuse me’, and that claiming the right to abuse would be typical for the subject in sadism, while the subject in masochism would claim the right to be abused. While this is a gross simplification of Lacan’s view of the sadist and masochist positions, as we will see in our section on Seminar X (1962), Toscano’s interpretation is indicative of the importance of the shift between the two versions, which we see more as linked to the importance for Lacan of the differentiation between the subject of enunciation and the enunciating subject. We will develop this idea further.

We see these shifts of accent in general as the result of the evolution of Lacan’s thinking about jouissance and the object *a* between 1959, when these concepts are still in status nascendi and 1962, the time of writing of “Kant with Sade” (1966), when the concepts acquire clear contours and more substance, as we will show in our analysis of Seminar X (1962).

For our analysis, we will base ourselves on the fourth formulation.

### *Interpretation of the final formulation*

We turn to the text of “Kant with Sade” to analyze how Lacan reads the Sadean maxim in its final formulation (1966, pp. 648-652).

As said, Lacan’s main thesis is that Sade’s ‘maxim’ fulfills Kant’s criteria and that it is more honest, because it recognizes the split in the subject. But how must that be interpreted?

In order to decorticate this claim, we analyze some key moments of the text in depth. We mainly focus on the notions of non-reciprocity, of kerygma, of the subject of the statement

and the subject of the enunciation, and on the relation between the subject and the Other in the maxim.

### Jouissance excludes reciprocity

To begin with, Lacan introduces the maxim as “the maxim that proposes a rule for jouissance” (1966, p. 648). This provides the context in which it should be read: as a questioning about the status of jouissance and the law, and about their interrelation.

Lacan remarks about the maxim that it can serve “as a paradigm of a statement that as such excludes reciprocity” (1966, p. 649). We refer here to what we said in the context of our discussion of the parable of Saint Martin (1959, p. 185). Reciprocity, to be short, is what happens at the symbolic level. It is characteristic of the relationship between subjects that is exemplified by the exchange of goods, of pleasure, a relation governed by the rules of addition and subtraction, and thus symmetric. One could say that it is ruled by the pleasure principle. But when the relationship between subjects concerns jouissance, it becomes of an entirely different nature: asymmetric, not reciprocal, not subsumable under a calculus. As it concerns the other's Thing, the other's object *a*, there is no exchange possible: one's jouissance is evil, deadly. One could say that it is ruled by the death drive. And, to go beyond Freud: it is unique, incommensurable, irrational: it is that what drives desire, it is beyond pleasure, and, in concreto, it concerns a partial object, the object *a*. This is what makes Lacan say that reciprocity is “intrinsically incompatible with subjective structures” (1966, p. 649). In other words: once one considers the Real as being part of the makeup of the subject – here as encountered in jouissance –, as playing a part in the subjective structure, the Symbolical doesn't suffice to account for what is at stake.

In the context of his analysis of the maxim, Lacan uses this remark on the exclusion of reciprocity to show that the fact of proclaiming the maxim puts the participants in the scenario in different, asymmetrical positions. This non-symmetry will also be important for the idea of the ‘turning around’ of the matheme of the phantasm ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ) into the matheme

of the Sadean phantasm as ( $a < > \$$ ) (1966, p. 653), and later on, in Seminar X (1962), in the reckoning of the respective positions of the subject in masochism and sadism.<sup>204</sup>

### The kerygma

Lacan also states that the maxim is acceptable as a universal rule because its “sole proclamation (its *kerygma*)” (1966, p. 649) instates two things.

Kerygma is an important term here. It is originally a theological concept, standing for the preaching or proclamation of the Christian gospel — the active delivering of the message, not the message itself. It comes from the Greek *kēryssein*, ‘to proclaim’. Lacan uses it to stress how the proclamation of a moral law in itself is an event, that it, as an ‘intervention of the signifier’, produces something, causes something. This ‘kerygma’ is what Austin (1976) would call a ‘performative utterance’, a situation in which an utterance makes something happen, as in ‘I do’ (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) — as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony. It stresses the *act* of speech, that what language performs, that what speaking makes happen.

What now, are the two things that the ‘performative utterance’ of the maxim makes happen?

Firstly, as Kant’s Categorical Imperative does, the proclamation of the Sadean maxim instates literally the radical rejection of the pathological: there is nothing pathological that can limit the capriciousness (1966, p.649). Moreover, that, which appears, when everything pathological is done away with, is *jouissance*.

Secondly, by first stripping the law of its possible ‘pathological’ or ‘phenomenal’ content, the Sadean maxim, like Kant’s objectless Categorical Imperative, instates “the form of this law, which is also its only substance” (1966, p. 649). It instates the law as empty, as pure, as abstract. In other words: “the will becomes bound to the law only by eliminating

from its practice every reason that is not based on the maxim itself” (p. 649) – i.e., as Kant would call it, by being a ‘pure’ will.

The Sadean paradox imposes two imperatives on us as if upon the Other

Immediately after his remark about the Kerygma and the two things it instates, Lacan makes another complex remark that needs quite some elucidation. He says that “[...] these two imperatives [...] are imposed on us, according to the Sadean paradox, as if upon the Other, and not upon ourselves” (1966, p. 649). He immediately adds that (Kant’s) moral imperative “does no less, since it is from the Other that its commandment requisitions us” (p. 831).<sup>205</sup>

We first elaborate on the notion of a ‘Sadean paradox’, then on the idea of ‘two imperatives’ and finally on the notion of these being imposed on us ‘as if upon the Other’.

Firstly, what Lacan means with the Sadean paradox is not immediately clear. But what he writes a few pages earlier about a paradox, albeit in the context of his comments on Kant, is clarifying: “the paradox that it is at the very moment at which the subject no longer has any object before him that he encounters a law that has no other phenomenon than something that is already signifying” (1966, p. 647).<sup>206</sup>

Putting both quotes alongside makes it seem plausible that what Lacan calls the Sadean paradox, is the fact that, when one does away with all pathological ‘limits’, disposes of all objects of the law, the ‘empty’ law gets anyway – paradoxically— endowed with something ‘phenomenal’, namely ‘something that is already signifying’. This ‘something’ is the command as command, the law as law, whose sole kerygma imposes itself, as engendered out of a pure form.<sup>207</sup>

Of course, this Sadean paradox, read in such a way, would also be Kantian. In Kant, it is also by doing away with the pathological that the formality of the law engenders

‘something that is already signifying’, i.e. the Categorical Imperative as a pure command. In this sense, it seems strange that Lacan calls this paradox here specifically ‘Sadean’.

However that may be, one of the main points in Lacan’s text is that this ‘something that is already signifying’ differs for the Kantian and Sadean laws. The main difference is that, while the Kantian law is “obtained from a voice in conscience” (Lacan, 1966, p. 647), in other words from ‘within’ the subject, the Sadean maxim is obtained from elsewhere. The place from where the Sadean maxim is obtained, however, is less clearly identified by Lacan: it seems to find its source in a faceless instance outside of the subject, an instance that Lacan seems to identify with the Other. It is here that Sade’s concept of Nature finds its place. We refer to our discussion of this concept in the section on Seminar VII (1959), and we will come back to this concept later. Suffice here to quote the last line of a long passage from Sade that Lacan cites in Seminar VII (1959, p. 211): “nature wants annihilation; it is beyond our capacity to achieve the scale of destruction it desires.” In other words: the destruction the libertine aims at, he enacts in the name of Nature. One could say: in the name of the Other. However, while the libertine aims to fulfill Nature’s desire, he is doomed to fail.

One can alternatively see this instance as the death drive, a striving for pure destruction, or as the cruel superego, emitting enigmatic commands and laws that make the subject suffer. While in Seminar VII (1959), the superego is an important concept for Lacan, in “Kant with Sade” (1966), he only refers to it once, in an indirect way. The main thing is that the law comes from outside, from the Other.

Secondly, what does Lacan point to when he speaks about *two* imperatives? One could be tempted to read the two imperatives as the Kantian and the Sadean imperatives. However, this contrasts with the fact that Lacan in one sentence says that *both* imperatives are imposed to us as if upon the Other and in the next that the (*Kantian*) moral imperative does the same, which seems to imply that *both* imperatives are Sadean.

Another, more probable, reading is to see the first imperative as the imperative that imposes the radical rejection of the pathological, and the second imperative as that what imposes the form of the law, that is also its only substance. Hughes (2009, p. 64) and the anonymous writer of “Paraphrase de Kant avec Sade” (1970, p. 306) also hold this view. The latter remarks, interestingly, that it is not really about two imperatives, but about two *parts* of the Categorical Imperative, which he respectively calls ‘category’ — thoughts without phenomenal content, i.e. purely formal thoughts — and ‘imperativity’.

Interestingly, in the Critique version of “Kant with Sade” (1963), Lacan wrote “these two terms” instead of “two imperatives” — which clearly points to the radical rejection of the pathological and the form of the law as articulated in the sentence before. This correction corroborates the second reading, and at the same time stresses the importance for Lacan of the notion that it is about two *imperatives*.

The third element in the complicated quote that demands further analysis, is the idea that the Sadean maxim is imposed to us ‘as if upon the Other’. In other words, if the faceless source, the faceless author of the law is the Other, how can the law then be imposed to us “as if upon the Other, and not upon ourselves”? We will come back later to this difficulty, after having analyzed the role of the distinction between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation in the Sadean maxim.

### The bipolarity

For now, we continue to follow the text to the letter:

We perceive quite nakedly here [...] that the bipolarity upon which the moral law is founded is nothing but the split [refente] in the subject brought about by any and every intervention of the signifier: the split between the enunciating subject [sujet de l'énonciation] and the subject of the statement [sujet de l'énoncé] (1966, p. 650).

Lacan says that the moral law is founded on a bipolarity, which, he claims, finds its origin in the split in the subject, resulting from the intervention of the signifier. The thesis that



the subject is split as a result of the intervention of the signifier is one of the basic notions of Lacan, albeit more complex than mostly thought. A naive question can help unfold this notion: in which parts does the signifier split the subject?

While Lacan's answers differ according to the moments in his trajectory in which he formulates them, they can be summarized under two basic answers: firstly, the 'early Lacan' holds that the signifier splits the subject in the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation, secondly, the 'later Lacan' claims that the signifier splits the mythical complete subject into the split subject and the object *a*. While the first answer stresses the symbolic register, the second answer stresses the Real.

While the concepts 'enunciating subject' and 'subject of the statement' are known Lacanian concepts, which seem clearly understandable at first sight, they merit some elucidation that will throw another light on the apparent simplicity of the answer of the early Lacan.

The notions have their roots in linguistic theory. Benveniste, who Lacan knew well enough to know of his theories before their publication, coined the concepts. The easiest way to conceive of them are as the subject that makes the statement and the subject as it appears in the statement made (Lewis, 2008, p. 34). But Benveniste actually goes further: he sees enunciation as language put into action by an individual act of usage – resulting in the emergence of the subject of the statement (1966, pp. 223-230).

The real importance of Benveniste's distinction does not lie in a hierarchic ordering of grammatical subjects, but in the stress he puts on the subject of enunciation as *actor* of language, as the instance that makes happen what language 'does', which is similar to what we said higher about Austin and the performative aspect of language. Lacan uses the distinction between the enunciating subject and the subject of the statement mostly to stress that the subject that sees itself reflected in the statement, tends to obscure the real actor of language, hidden behind the literal subject: the Other.

Seen like this, the answer of the early Lacan is compatible, or at least partly overlapping with that of the later. One could see the subject of the enunciation as the object *a*, in the sense that it is that, from which desire originates, that it is the cause of desire, and as such that, which is behind and beyond speech. It is what speaks in us, what escapes us in our speech, what makes us a split, lacking subject. As subject of the statement, one is not speaking, one is merely spoken.

One can see this split between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement reflected in the grammatical structure of the maxim. It can be read as one imperative 'embedding' another.

The first imperative can be seen as being made up of the direct reason part, of the 'quoted words', the 'related speech' part of the entire imperative:

- (1) I have the right to enjoy your body, and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body.

This first imperative, which is the direct reason part of the entire maxim, can be seen as embedded in a second imperative. This second imperative consists of the direct reason part plus what in Latin grammar is called the 'inquit', the indirect reason part; here, this indirect part is the phrase "anyone can say to me". The second imperative is thus the whole embedding sentence:

- (2) I have the right to enjoy your body, anyone can say to me, and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body.<sup>208</sup>

Both imperatives are stated 'by' and addressed 'to' different grammatical subjects: in the first, 'embedded' imperative, it is stated by the 'I' and addressed to the 'you'. In the second, 'embedding' imperative, it is different: it (can) be stated by 'anyone', and is addressed to 'me'.

This can be summarized as follows:

Imperative	Stated by	Stated to
1 embedded	I	you
2 embedding	anyone	me

Table 9 The embedded and the embedding imperatives

This differentiation between two imperatives allows us to corroborate our reading of the Other as the source of the Sadean maxim. In the second imperative, it is indeed the ‘anyone’ who can call upon this right that is the ‘source’ of the maxim. It is this ‘anyone’ that is, in Lacanian terms, the Other as source of the law.

Sade is more honest

At this point in the text, Lacan comes to his stated goal: demonstrating that Sade reveals the truth of Kant. He puts it thus: “In coming out of the Other’s mouth, Sade’s maxim is more honest than Kant’s appeal to the voice within, since it unmask the split in the subject that is usually covered up” (Lacan, 1966, p. 650).

For Kant, the kerygma, the intervention of the signifier, comes from the inner voice, the voice of conscience. In other words: it comes from within the subject, which makes the Kantian subject an ‘unsplit’ subject, a ‘whole’ subject. In other words, Kant masks the split between enunciating subject (the voice within) and the subject of the enunciation (the will): the voice within and the will, for Kant, are one.

In Sade, the division of the subject is plied open and made dynamic, resulting in a more truthful topology — an infinitely recursive one — of the subject. It is in this sense that we understand Lacan’s claim that Sade gives the truth of Kant (1966, p. 646).

To be more precise: for Sade, the intervention of the signifier, is coming from the Other, and this intervention has a lethal, a splitting effect on the subject: “the discourse of the right to jouissance clearly posits the Other qua free — the Other’s freedom — as its enunciating subject, in a way that does not differ from the Tu es which is evoked out of the lethal depths [fonds tuant] of every imperative” (Lacan, 1966, p. 650).

Why the Other as free? It seems that Lacan simply aims at the idea that the Other is free to do whatever he wants with the subject: the Other is, in other words, free to use the right to enjoy the subject’s body or not. The Other is free because he can reply to the subject’s most intimate question, i.e. ‘Che voi?’, ‘What do you want (from me)?’, with the lethal answer ‘Anything I fancy!’ or ‘Jouissance!’.

One could be tempted to read the idea of a free Other as pointing to the notion of a complete Other, an Other that is lacking nothing. But this would lead to a contradiction: if the Other would be complete, without lack, he would not be desiring, he would not want anything from the subject. This is one of the main reasons Lacan, from Seminar VI (1958) onwards, vehemently rejects the idea of a complete Other.

The kerygma, the intervention of the signifier, the discourse of the right to jouissance, poses the subject as suffering, as victim, as split. It shows that there is something lethal in him, jouissance, something of the death drive, something unassumable – something that is different, Other, while it is at the same time part of the subject. This reflects the idea that that, which is the most intimate in us, is also that what is strangest in us — which is reminiscent of Lacan’s use the concept neighbor in Seminar VII (1959) that we discussed earlier.

We follow Lacan as he continues, with the last sentence of this long paragraph, which sounds very enigmatic: “But this discourse is no less determinant for the subject of the statement, giving rise to him with each addressing of its equivocal content: since jouissance, shamelessly avowed in its very purpose, becomes one pole in a couple, the

other pole being in the hole that jouissance already drills in the Other's locus in order to erect the cross of Sadean experience in it" (Lacan, 1966, p. 650).

In other words: the discourse of the right to jouissance not only unmasks the split between the enunciating subject (here the Other out of who's mouth the maxim comes) and the subject of the statement (the 'me' that states that the 'I' has the right etc.). It does more: it is the kerygma of this discourse that is also at the *origin* of both the enunciating subject and the subject of the statement.

In this quote, Lacan claims that both the Other *and* the subject find their origin in the intervention of the signifier, which, for Lacan, comes down to claiming that they find both their origin in the Other; to be more precise: in the jouissance of the Other.<sup>209</sup>

As Lacan alternatively formulates it in the penultimate sentence of the paragraph quoted above: "the Tu es which is invoked out of the lethal depths [fonds tuant] of every imperative". In other words: every imperative, every kerygma invokes the 'Tu es'. This 'Tu es', French for 'You are', sounds like 'tuer', French for 'to kill'. It points to the subject as defined – and thus 'killed', 'negated' in the Spinozean sense, or at least castrated – and the Other as defining and to both, in their vital interdependence, as originating in the kerygma, in the quintessential act of language: there, where 'saying makes it so', to paraphrase Austin.

But what about the 'couple' with 'two poles'? This notion, which appears at the final sentence of the paragraph and is not referred to later in the text, seems so unclear that it makes one of the commentators of "Kant with Sade" (1966) exclaim: "This is classic Lacan: it sounds intriguing, but no one most likely has any idea what it could possibly mean" (Fink, 2014, p. 127).

While we agree with Fink about the obscurity of the passage, we still retain the idea of 'two poles' — one of them being 'jouissance', the other 'the hole that jouissance already drills in the Other's locus'.<sup>210</sup> These poles point at least in the direction of the idea that

there is a link between jouissance and the Other as incomplete — as ‘holed’. In other words, it is jouissance, as a manifestation of the Real, that makes the Other incomplete, that shows the inconsistency of the symbolic order, that turns, in terms of Lacanian algebra, A (the Other) into  $\bar{A}$  (the incomplete, barred, lacking Other). In other words, the Other ‘splits’, which is consistent with the schema above. It also points in the direction of the idea that perversion, the ‘erecting of the cross of Sadean experience’ into the Other, has to do something with the incompleteness of the Other. This incompleteness of the Other, which Lacan only indexes in “Kant with Sade” (1966), is one of the central points of his analysis of perversion in Seminar X (1962), as we will show.

### Baas and Miller

The convolution, the recursion and the aporias of Lacan’s formulation of Sade’s maxim lead important commentators to contradictory interpretations. We concentrate here on Bernard Baas’ interesting essay “Le Désir Pur” (1987) and to Miller’s detailed lecture “A Discussion of Lacan’s Kant with Sade” (1996). The contradictions are most apparent in the way the two authors interpret the split between the subject of the statement and the enunciating subject in Sade’s maxim.

These contradictory interpretations, however, also yield some interesting concepts that we will use in our further analysis of “Kant with Sade” (1966). The tripartition of instances that Baas finds in the Sadean maxim will be useful to analyze the graph of the Sadean phantasm, while Miller’s interpretation will allow us to make sense of the idea that the Sadean maxim is imposed to us as if ‘upon the Other’.

In an intricate analysis of the Sadean maxim (1987, pp. 66-67), Baas distinguishes three instances that he also claims to find in Kant’s Categorical Imperative: the author of the law, the executor of the law and the subject of the law.

Baas says that in Kant’s imperative, the subject as rational being is the author of the law; as free or autonomous, he is the executor of the law, and as endowed with a ‘good will’, he is subject to the law.

In the scenes Sade describes, Baas discerns the same three instances: the victim is subject to the law, the tormentor is instrument and executor of the law, and a third instance, who urges the action on, who proscribes the law, who says: 'do your duty', is the author of the law. Baas sees them incarnated by three characters of the play: respectively Eugénie, Dolmancé and Mme de Saint-Ange (Baas, 1987, p. 65).

Further in his analysis, Baas 'regroups' these three instances back into two instances, that coincide with the subject of the statement and the enunciating subject:

In this imperative, the 'I' that states his right to jouissance is not the 'me' that states the imperative, so that the Sadean imperative implicates and manifests the subjective division as a division of the subject of the statement and of the enunciating subject (Baas, 1989, p. 66).<sup>211</sup>

Baas sees the 'me' here as the enunciating subject, while the 'I' is the subject of the statement. In that sense, the 'me', the enunciating subject, is at the same time author of the law and subject of the law, while the 'I', the subject of the statement, is the executor of the law.

grammatical subjects in maxim	3 instances	2 subjects
'me'	author of the law	enunciating
	subject to the law	
'I'	executor of the law	of the statement

Table 10 Analysis of Baas' grammatical subjects in the Sadean maxim.

It is on this 'regrouping' of three instances into two that Baas bases himself to explain that the imperative that is imposed to the 'me', is at the same time imposed to us 'as to the Other'. For Baas, the 'me' as author of the law, proscribes the law to the 'me' as victim, i.e. he proscribes the law to himself as if it were to another – to 'the' Other: "The 'I' that

says: 'I have the right', the subject of the statement, reduces itself to being only the agent of the law that he imposes to the Other" (Baas, 1987, p. 67).

Baas interprets Lacan as claiming that Kant's imperative implicates that the law comes from the Other, as such masking what Sade shows, namely that the law comes from the division of the subject.

While Baas is right to claim that Sade shows that the law comes from the division of the subject, he is certainly wrong about Kant: Kant does not claim that the law comes from the Other, but from within the subject. Lacan clearly claims that for Kant, the law comes from the 'voice within', from within the subject, and not from the Other: "In coming out of the Other's mouth, Sade's maxim is more honest than Kant's appeal to the voice within, since it unmasks the split in the subject that is usually covered up" (1966, p. 650).

Moreover, as this quote makes clear, it is in Sade that Lacan finds that the law comes from the Other.

Miller gives a quite different, more complex and more precise interpretation of the split between the enunciating subject and the subject of the statement, that is more in line with ours:

[Sade, or the Sadean subject] subjects himself to another's law. 'I', 'Je' in French, is subjected to any other [...] the other has the right [...] Sade's regime is a regime of freedom. His discourse of the right to enjoyment situates the other as its enunciating subject. Not as the subject of the enunciated or statement, because in the statement it is: 'anyone can say to me'. The 'me' designates the subject of the statement. But what props up enunciation is the other as free to do whatever he wants with me (Miller, 1996, p. 234).<sup>212</sup>

While Baas analyses the Sadean maxim as consisting of two layers – the 'embedded' and the 'embedding' imperatives –, Miller seems to take one more step back. While agreeing that the 'me' states the embedding imperative and the 'I' states the embedded imperative, Miller looks behind the question "Which grammatical subject is stating what?". He gives an interpretation of the term 'the subject of the enunciation' that is less literally



grammatical, and looks at the 'intention' behind it. In other words, he asks: what is behind this discourse? Which instance is at the origin of this discourse? What is the hidden, unconscious cause of this discourse, this discourse of the right to enjoyment? His answer is, as we already stated above: the Other. The Other – moreover: the Other as free – is the enunciating subject of Sade's discourse of the right to jouissance.

How can that be? For Miller, the 'I' that claims to have the right to enjoy, the tormentor, is himself subjected. As Miller specifies: he is subjected to another's law, to 'any other'. We read this in a double sense. Firstly, the tormentor as the instrument of the source and herald of the maxim, of the right that he receives from the Other, is subjected to this Other. Secondly: the tormentor can be subjected, in his turn, to any other ('any one') who at his turn could invoke the maxim, could make use of the same law. This does not mean that the 'I' and the 'me' are in reciprocal positions, but that the 'me' can — "à charge de revanche" as Lacan puts it,<sup>213</sup> on its turn, as one could translate it — take the position of the 'I'. In that sense the 'I' is also, just like the 'me', subjected to *any* other — and thus to the Other.

This double reading reveals that anyone – the 'I' and the 'me' each on their turn – is subjected to the Other, who is hidden beyond the maxim: the Other is thus the enunciating subject. It thus becomes understandable why this enunciating subject is here characterized as 'free': the Other is free to do whatever he wants: with 'me', but also, in its turn, with the 'I'.

As for the subject of the statement, Miller seems to simply interpret it in the literal sense, as the grammatical subject of the written phrase: as such it is indeed simply the victim, the 'me' of 'anyone can say to me'.

To recapitulate:

	BAAS		MILLER	
	3 instances	2 subjects	3 instances	2 subjects
'me'	author of the law	enunciating	subject to the law (and, on its turn) executor of the law	of the statement
	subject to the law			
'I'	executor of the law	of the statement	executor of the law (and, on its turn) subject to the law	
'anyone'			author of the law (the Other)	enunciating

Table 11 Grammatical subjects in the Sadean maxim

Miller's interpretation allows us to answer the question we left unanswered above. If the faceless source, the faceless author of the law is the Other, how can the law then be imposed to me *as if upon the Other*? Miller's answer seems to be simply: it is imposed upon me because it is imposed upon anyone. In that sense, it not imposed upon me as a particular subject.

We go one step further in our interpretation: we see the law as imposed upon the Other in me, upon that, which is at the same time most intimate to me and strangest — or extimate — to me: that, what I find in my neighbor as in myself. Another way of putting this is that in the maxim, the victim takes the place of the Other in the relationship of the Sadean subject with the Other, or, alternatively, that in the Sadean maxim, the victim covers over, stands in for the Other that is at the same time beyond and underneath. As

an anonymous author puts it, in his very precise paraphrasing of a large part of “Kant with Sade” (1966), the ‘me’ in the maxim is like the transcendental subject in the Kantian sense, which he pictures as a subject stripped of its pathos, of its soul (Anonymous, 1970, p. 307).

Our reading implies the confusing presence of the Other in multiple places in the maxim — as the author and as the subject of the law. This confusing localization of the Other and the subject makes it impossible to represent their locations in the maxim in the form of a simple table as the ones we gave above to summarize part of Baas’ and Miller’s interpretations.

We will develop this idea of the subject being in the place of the Other further when analyzing the schema of the Sadean phantasm.

Baas’ and Miller’s interpretations allow us also to clarify the link between the ‘instances’ Lacan uses in his analysis of the Sadean maxim and these in the analysis of the Sadean schema which we will turn to later.

For now, to summarize, we will project the three instances or ‘roles’ – author, executor and subject of the law – into the terminology Lacan uses in his schema of the Sadean phantasm. This will be helpful in the analysis of the following paragraphs of “Kant with Sade” (1966).

Firstly, the ‘me’ can be seen as the victim of the scenario, the subject of the law, the suffering subject that is ‘split’ by pain and humiliation. Lacan denotes it as \$ in the schema of the Sadean phantasm.

Secondly, the ‘I’, the tormentor in the maxim, can be seen as the executioner, the agent of the law, the apathetic instrument of the law. As agent, he is also a mediator, that what links the author of the law to the subject of the law. In that, he does not only ‘unite’ the agent and the author of the law, by doing so he also accentuates the fact that they are

not one, that they are 'split' to begin with. Lacan will characterize this instance as object *a* in the schema.

The third instance, that hides behind the 'anyone', is the author, the promulgator, the herald of the Law. It is the anonymous instance, the Other, the will, the will of the Other, the will to jouissance, that also can be read as the superego, conscience, as the 'voice' within, as Kant calls it, but that is unmasked as coming from elsewhere. Lacan will denote this instance with 'v'.

As an aside, it is amusing to see that other commentators come up with yet other role distributions in their interpretation of the Sadean maxim. For Žižek for instance, the herald of the maxim is the executioner himself: "Via the reference to Sade, Lacan reads absence in Kant as an act of rendering invisible, of 'repressing', the moral Law's enunciator, and it is Sade who renders it visible in the figure of the 'sadist' executioner-torturer — this executioner is the enunciator of the moral Law, the agent who finds pleasure in our (the moral subject's) pain and humiliation" (Žižek, 1998, p. 3). It is clear that we don't follow Žižek here.

### Pain, jouissance, and the object of the law

In the third logical step — to be found in the fourth paragraph of the first part of "Kant with Sade" (1966, pp. 650-652) —, Lacan deals with pain in the relationship between the Sadean subject and its victim, with the nature of jouissance and with the object of the law. We focus first on pain and jouissance, and turn our attention to the object of the law afterwards.

## *Pain and jouissance*

Pain, according to Lacan, is central to both Kant and Sade's laws. In Seminar VII (1959), discussing Kant and Sade, Lacan called pain "the outer extremity of pleasure" — in other words: *jouissance* — when it involves "forcing an access to the Thing" (1959, p. 80).

For Kant, pain is among the consequences of moral experience, whereby the subject suffers from foregoing pleasure. As such, one could say that, for Kant, it is the only phenomenal content brought about by the moral law (cf. Lacan, 1959, p. 80).

Lacan shows the function of pain in the Sadean experience by a small thought experiment: what would it mean for the Sadean tormentor if the victim reacted to the inflicted pain as a Stoic would do: with scorn? *Jouissance*, Lacan answers, would be turned into disgust (1966, pp. 650-651).

Said otherwise, for Sade, the pain provoked in the subject to the law, in the victim, is a means to an end, this end being the *jouissance* brought to the tormentor. Attaining the modesty [*pudeur*] of the subject is a necessary condition for the *jouissance* of the Sadean subject. As Lacan puts it, once more in a convoluted fashion:

*Jouissance* is that by which Sadean experience is modified. For it only proposes to monopolize a will after having already traversed it in order to instate itself at the inmost core of the subject whom it provokes beyond that by offending his sense of modesty [*pudeur*] (1966, p. 651).

The first sentence is not as straightforward as it looks, for *jouissance* *makes* the Sadean experience, it is what the Sadean experience brings to the tormentor; it doesn't *modify* it. We take this to be an imprecision of Lacan. Another possibility is that it points to a modification of the 'moral' experience, where Sadean experience would be a modification of the Kantian experience in that it leads to *jouissance* (Nobus, unpublished, p. 53). One could argue here that the Kantian experience also brings a certain hidden *jouissance* to its subject. However that might be, and which interpretation one chooses, is immaterial here: it is enough to know that for Lacan, *jouissance* is central to the Sadean experience.

The fact that Sadean experience strives to win over, to 'monopolize' the will of the victim, to 'instate itself at the inmost core of the subject', is readily understandable, and it seems clear here that the subject in the quote is the victim. But it is not clear why it does so only 'after having already traversed' this will.

The idea that Sadean experience 'provokes a subject' is not clear either, but we will come back to it. What the 'beyond that' points at, is not clear; we will leave this question mark unresolved.

Modesty is here the central point. Lacan comes back to it in the next sentence, and calls modesty an 'amboceptor', a term that stems from biology, designating an element that forms a connection between two other elements. Seen like that, modesty is bound to both the victim and the executioner. As Lacan puts it, the immodesty of the one (the executioner) violates the modesty of the other (the victim) (1966, p. 651).

This violation of modesty is reminiscent of what we wrote about scotophilia in the section dealing with Lacan on sadism and masochism before Seminar VII (1959), where we quoted Lacan as saying that the desire of the partner in scotophilia is involved beyond its modesty (cf. Lacan, 1958, p. 294).

We read the 'violation of the modesty' of the victim as a breaking open of the subject, as bringing the split of the subject to the light, as bringing the — always perverse — desire of the subject out in the open. It is epitomized in a small passage from Sade that Lacan will quote in Seminar X (1962, p. 165). At the high point of "Juliette", the protagonist reports the strange, triumphant words of her tormentor: "More screams from me only animate this scoundrel who next inserts his fingers into my vagina; they come out bringing with them the skin he has scraped from the walls of that delicate part. "Lubin," he then murmured to his valet, exhibiting his bloody fingers, "my dear Lubin, I triumph. Cunt-skin" (Sade, 1797, p. 195).

It is difficult to imagine a clearer staging of the phantasm to get a hold of the split of the subject, of the object *a*.<sup>214</sup> It is equally difficult not to interpret this as a confirmation of Freud's thesis concerning the pervert's attempt to perceive woman as, upon close inspection and against all odds, not missing a phallus.

In the next sentence, Lacan says about this connection between the victim and the executioner that it is a "connection that could justify [...] what I said before regarding the subject's assertion in the Other's place" (1966, p. 651). He continues as follows: "Let us question this jouissance, which is precarious because it depends on an echo that it sets off in the Other" (p. 651).

Here, Lacan seems to equate the subject with the tormentor and the Other with the victim, which seems contradictory at first sight, but is understandable when recalling what we said earlier about the command that is addressed to us as if to the Other — and also with what we said about the presence of the Other in different loci of the maxim.

Miller has an interesting take on this, when he says: "The Other is not situated in the same place as the subject, but in another sense the whole schema represents the Other's place or space. In one paragraph, Lacan makes the Other other than the subject, and in another paragraph, the Other is the place of both the Other and the subject" (Miller, 1996 p. 235).

This reading is corroborated by two earlier places in "Kant with Sade" (1966) that Lacan points to when he says "what I said before regarding the subject's assertion in the Other's place". First, he said: "The constraint [the Sadean tormentor] endures here is not so much one of violence as of principle, the problem for the person who makes it into a sentence not being so much to make another man consent to it as to pronounce it in his place" (Lacan, 1966, p. 650).

In other words: to pronounce the maxim, to assert his right to jouissance, the tormentor has to put himself in the place of the enunciating subject, in the place of the Other. As such, it is the Other who enjoys.

Secondly, a few lines later, Lacan writes: “the hole that jouissance already drills in the Other’s locus” (p. 650). As we wrote above, it is jouissance that discompletes the Other, that puts the bar into the A, turning it into  $\bar{A}$ . It is also jouissance, intruding in the realm of the pleasure principle by the kerygma of the maxim, that gives rise to the subject of the statement. Confer what Lacan says about the discourse of the right to jouissance: that it also is determinant for the subject of the statement (p. 650).

This perspective also allows us to make sense of the idea that jouissance in the Sadean experience provokes a subject: the jouissance of the Other gives, structurally, birth to the subject, provokes the subject — as split.

In the continuation of this, it seems only logical to equate jouissance and the death drive: it is that, what seems “thrilled only by itself” (p. 651) — i.e. destrudo in its pure state.

### *The object of the law*

According to Kant, Lacan stresses, the object of the law is unattainable, lacking, and, by lacking, it is relegated “to the unthinkability of the thing in itself” (p. 651) — the Ding an Sich as Kant called that which is beyond the phenomenal, the Thing as Lacan called it in Seminar VII (1959).

In Sade, Lacan finds the same object, with the difference that here, it is no longer inaccessible. Lacan finds it in “the being-in-the-world, the Dasein of the tormenting agent” (1966, p. 651), which he also refers to as its ‘presence’ (p. 652).

It is here, in the object of the law, that one can recognize the object *a*. That is why Lacan claims that this object retains (as in Kant) the opacity of the transcendent (1966, p. 651).



It is instantiated by the agent of the law, but, as opaque and transcendent, it is separated from the subject (1966, p. 651). The tormentor, as actor, is desubjectivized, petrified, and becomes like an object – the object *a*.

Commenting on this separation of the object from the subject, Lacan takes a remarkable turn. He says: “Let us observe that the herald of the maxim need be no more here than a point of broadcast. It could be a voice on the radio [...]. Such voice-related phenomena, especially those found in psychosis, truly have this object-like appearance” (p. 651).

Here Lacan, speaking about the object, makes a switch: while he spoke about the object of the law as the tormenting agent, here he speaks about this object, separated from the subject as ‘the herald of the maxim’, which need to be no more than ‘a point of broadcast’, or ‘a voice on the radio’. In other words, he speaks here of the herald of the law as the object *a*. The fact that in Seminar X (1962), as said, the disembodied voice will be one of the five instantiations of the object *a*, corroborates this interpretation. For Sade, this object has a name: it is Nature, Nature’s voice. As his character Dolmancé puts it: “Nothing is as egotistical as nature’s voice. And what we hear most sharply in that voice is the holy and immutable advice to enjoy ourselves, no matter what it costs others” (Sade, 1795, p. 65). As said earlier, what the libertines do, they do in obeisance to the voice of Nature.

But this raises two questions. Firstly, do we have two separate instances, the tormentor and the herald — as voice of Nature —, or are they one and the same? Secondly, are they both to be seen as object *a*? How to make sense of that in combination with the idea that the herald is also Nature and the Other?

It is clear that Lacan is still wrestling here with his conception of the object *a* — and, accordingly, with his definition of the Other, which now is complete, then again incomplete — which leads here to more than one contradiction. However, in the process, the object *a* gains structure and complexity: a subject can be in the position of object *a* (as the tormentor is), but it can also be something that a subject relates to, as here the tormentor

to the Other, in the instance of the herald, which can be thought of as a point of broadcast or as a disembodied voice.

The way Lacan characterizes the object *a* as a substitute for the Other in Seminar XX is enlightening here: “the partner that is the “I” that is the subject, the subject of any sentence that constitutes a demand, is not the Other, but that which is substituted for it in the form of the cause of desire” (Lacan, 1972, p. 186).

Next, Lacan turns back to Kant’s view on the object of the law: “Here we see why Kant views this object as evading every determination of transcendental aesthetics, even though it does not fail to appear in a certain bulge in the phenomenal veil, being not without hearth or home, time in intuition, modality situated in the unreal [irréel], or effect in reality” (1966, p. 651).

Here, Lacan points to the fact that Kant sees the object of the law as noumenal, even though it has also phenomenal consequences. Lacan does this in a confusing fashion, making a mess of Kant’s terminology.

When Lacan says the object is ‘evading every determination of transcendental aesthetics’, this means, in Kant’s terminology, that this object, as noumenal, does not exist in time and space, the forms of appearance, and as such the conditions of possibility to perceive phenomenal objects, which are studied in Kant’s transcendental aesthetics. Kant says, that for the Thing(s)-as-such, the apriori forms of intuition nor the categories apply.

When Lacan says that, however, it appears in ‘a certain bulge in the phenomenal veil’, he seems to claim that the object of the law — the object *a* — has effects beyond the noumenal, i.e. that it causes something phenomenal.

The reasons Lacan gives for this are fourfold. First, he claims that the object of the law has ‘hearth and home’, which hints at the fact that it has a locus, which means in Kantian

terminology that it is perceivable in space, and thus, as an object of intuition, of the outer sense, phenomenal. Secondly, he claims it has 'time in intuition', which in Kantian terms means that it is subsumable under the schema of time, and thus, as an object of intuition, of the 'inner sense', also phenomenal. These two reasons 'stick' with the Kantian terminology of the forms of sensuality, as studied in his transcendental aesthetics.

For the third and fourth reasons, Lacan uses Kant's terminology of the forms of reason, studied in his transcendental logic. The forms of reason in stricter sense are Kant's 12 categories, or predicates that hold for all possible objects, which are divided in four groups: quantity, quality, relation and modality.

When Lacan makes his third claim that the object of the law has 'modality', 'situated in the unreal', Lacan misattributes the category 'reality' to the category-group 'modality', which has 'existence' as one of its categories. Kant attributes the category of 'reality' to the category-group 'quality'.

Fourthly, Lacan claims that the object has 'effect in reality'. Here, he aims at the category of 'cause and effect', which is in the category-group 'relation'.

This disentanglement makes it clear that Lacan makes his own sauce with Kant's terminology, bending it heavily to support his view on the object *a* — here in its instantiation as object of the law and as disembodied voice.

To summarize, Lacan seems to claim some quite contradictory things: that the object *a* is noumenal, but still exists in space and time, that it is unreal and that, in our opinion the most important aspect, has effects on what is phenomenal. This points in the direction of Lacan's later characterization of the object *a* as cause of desire.

However vague Lacan's characterization of the object of the law may be, he makes it clear that he deems that Kant's conceptual apparatus isn't adapted to describe it.

For Kant, however, it is not because something is not an object of intuition that it cannot have an effect in reality – something Lacan doesn't see because he mingles Kant's Transcendental Aesthetics with his Transcendental Logic.

But why, according to Lacan, does Kant not want to see the 'effects' that the object of the law can have in the phenomenal? Firstly, because the voice, as origin of the law, as object *a*, forces the idea of the subject as split — while Kant thinks the inner voice as part of the subject. Secondly, Lacan claims that Kant wants to avoid that the object of the law would point to 'a bad God' – i.e. to a *jouissance* that is beyond the pleasure principle.

Lacan draws the attention to the fact that Christianity has made us used to not see God as *jouissance*, but also to the fact that there is a German Lutheran mystic tradition that does see God as such. The German term for what Lacan aims at, is *Grimmigkei*t, translatable as divine wrath, bitterness, fierceness, ferocity, grimness. The term is used by, amongst others, Jacob Boehme and Swedenborg, German Christian mystics in the Lutheran tradition with which Kant broke.<sup>215</sup>

This makes Lacan claim:

One might be tempted to think that Kant feels pressured here by what he hears too close by, not from Sade but from some nearby mystic, in the sigh that muffles what he glimpses beyond, having seen that his God is faceless: *Grimmigkei*t? (1966, p. 652).

It is to this image of a dark God that Lacan returns in Seminar XI (1963), when he comments on the Holocaust in an often quoted passage. He claims no Hegelian-Marxist premises can make sense of this historical event, and proposes to interpret the Holocaust as "the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice [...] something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell [...] the sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here the dark God" (1964, p. 275). A few lines further, Lacan claims to have written "Kant with Sade" (1966) in order to show that "desire in its pure state [...] culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of

love in one's human tenderness — I would say, not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder" (1964, pp. 275-276). Desire in its pure state is, of course, perverse.

Lacan concludes this section of "Kant with Sade" (1966) by implying that it is by turning a blind eye to this German mystic tradition that Kant 'smuggles' his idea of a 'Law for laws sake' through the objections of the object of the law having 'effect' in the phenomenal.

In this, once more, Lacan opposes Sade to Kant. Sade who is, according to Lacan, more honest, more truthful, calls this God-that-enjoys the "Supreme-Being-in-Evil" (1966, p. 652). In other words: in contrast to Kant, Sade admits a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle, an Other that enjoys, and admits that such a *jouissance* results in the sacrifice and murder of the pathological object.

We turn now to what it really is about in "Kant with Sade" (1966) when Lacan comes up with the Sadean maxim. It is about the phantasm, and, more precisely, about what happens when in the phantasm, the split subject and the object *a* change position.

### Analysis of the graph of the Sadean phantasm

In this section, we will concentrate on the graph of the Sadean phantasm, to be found in the second part of "Kant with Sade" (1966), mainly in the sixth paragraph of the text (1966, pp. 653-655). The second graph, which formalizes aspects of Sade's life, is of less interest to our purpose, as we will explain.

The matheme of the perverse phantasm is at the center of the first graph. It is written as the inverse of the matheme of the neurotic phantasm. The neurotic phantasm is written as  $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ , where the split subject is put in relation with the object that causes his desire. The Sadean phantasm is written as  $a \leftrightarrow \$$ .

Lacan states nowhere that the Sadean phantasm is the phantasm of perversion as opposed to the phantasm of neurosis.<sup>216</sup> He does not approach Sade's oeuvre as a clinical vignette about a subject in sadism. However, when Lacan writes the Sadean phantasm as  $a \leftrightarrow \$$ , he leans on and formalizes what he already explained in Seminar VI (1958), where he explicitly speaks about the phantasm of the subject in perversion (see higher). While in Seminar VI, he did not turn the perverse phantasm into a matheme – apart from in “Kant with Sade” (1966), the matheme  $a \leftrightarrow \$$  only appears once in the rest of Lacan's oeuvre, notably in Seminar X (1962) — the split subject and the object  $a$  did trade places in the perverse phantasm. In the graph of the Sadean phantasm as well, the Sadean subject finds itself in the place of the object  $a$ , the object held to be able to fill the lack of the subject. Moreover, when in Seminar X (1962) Lacan does deal explicitly with the phantasm of the subject of sadism, what he says has clearly its roots in the Sadean phantasm. Above all, the graph of the phantasm of the subject in sadism he presents there, is almost a perfect copy of the Sadean phantasm. For these reasons, we interpret the Sadean phantasm as being the phantasm of the subject in perversion.

Lacan unfolds the matheme of the Sadean phantasm to form the graph of the Sadean phantasm (1966, p. 653):

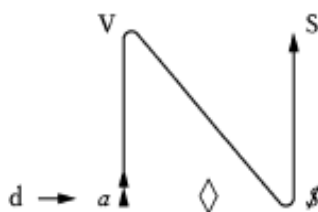


Figure 7 The graph of the Sadean phantasm

Like almost all of Lacan's schemas, it is multi-interpretable and far from self-explanatory. It is more a tool for thinking and exploring than a way to present a finished theory. Lacan himself calls the schema 'didactic' (1966, p. 653).

Lacan introduces it without much ado. He explains that his quadripartite schemata — one thinks of the schema L and the schema R — are “the construction of a subjective ordering”, and proposes to “modulate the Sadean fantasy with a new schema of this kind” (1966, p. 653). After giving the schema, he immediately starts to apply it to his reading of “Kant with Sade” (1966).

We will start with a structural analysis of the schema, at the same time gradually applying it to Lacan’s reading of Kant and Sade, and more generally to perversion.

To begin with, three structural traits in the schema stand out.

Firstly, the fact that it consists out of symbols connected by arrows, in other words: that it is constructed like a mathematical *graph*. In mathematics, a graph is a representation of a set of objects whereby some pairs of objects are connected by links. These linked objects are called vertices, while the links are called edges. Lacan used this kind of schema before, notably in his schema L, developed in the second Seminar (1954) and in his graph of desire that forms the backbone of his fifth Seminar (1957).

Note that, like these other schemata, the schema of the Sadean phantasm is, in the mathematical sense, not a real graph. In a real graph, edges connect vertices two by two. Here, there is a ‘normal’ edge going from *d* to *a*, but the edge that starts in *a* and goes to *S*, only traverses *V* and *\$* without explicitly connecting them. Also, directed edges in graphs are normally represented by a line that *ends* with a directional arrow just before the target vertex, while here, the edge from *a* to *S* *starts* with a directional arrow that is, moreover, double. It is thus clear that the schema is only loosely inspired by a mathematical graph.

Secondly, as said, the fact that part of it — that is, if we omit *d* and the directional arrow from *d* to *a* — is a quadripartite structure, like Lacan used in his schemas L and R, developed in Seminar II (1954) and in *On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis* (1966).

Thirdly the fact that it uses six 'algebraic' symbols. We understand them as follows:

d	desire
a	object <i>a</i>
V	the will (to jouissance)
\$	the split subject
S	the mythical unsplit subject, the subject 'of brute pleasure'
<>	desire for or relation with

Table 12 Algebraic symbols in the graph of Sadean desire

The schema can be seen as an unfolding of its kernel ( $a \diamond \$$ ), the matheme of the Sadean phantasm, into firstly a horizontal progression, secondly a zig-zag progression and finally the two-dimensional schema.

The horizontal progression consists out of:

$$d \rightarrow a \diamond \$$$

The zig-zag progression is obtained by following the directional arrows in the two-dimensional schema:

$$d \rightarrow a \rightarrow V \rightarrow \$ \rightarrow S$$

The zigzag progression is arranged in two-dimensional space, giving the full, two-dimensional schema as represented above.

We will analyze these two progressions and the full schema separately.



## The horizontal progression

$$d \rightarrow a < > \$$$

If one tries to read the horizontal progression immediately by ‘translating’ the symbols used by their ‘meaning’ as given in the table above, the result is pure nonsense. It would be something like: ‘desire precedes the object *a* desire for the split subject’.

It is probably better to ‘translate’ the kernel of the phantasm ( $a < > \$$ ) as a whole. Reading it that way, the result would be: ‘desire precedes the perverse phantasm’.

But in one of his sparse structural comments on the schema, Lacan says of its ‘base’: “The lower line accounts for the order of fantasy insofar as it props up the utopia of desire” (1966, p. 654). This seems to point to the contrary idea: that the phantasm would precede desire.

In this sense, just like the generic phantasm ( $\$ < > a$ ), Lacan seems to say, the perverse phantasm ( $a < > \$$ ) is what makes desire possible, by ‘propping it up’. In other words, the perverse phantasm makes desire possible by symbolizing an imaginary scenario that pictures the aim of desire — i.e. the rejoining of the object *a* and the barred subject, which would result in the mythical unbarred subject — as attainable. While the aim of desire, by definition, is unreachable, because utopic, literally without a place, the phantasm symbolizes the imaginary place where the aim of desire can be reached.

How to conciliate this with the fact that the arrow goes from desire to the phantasm, and not the other way around? The only explanation we see for this, is that desire logically precedes the object *a*, in the sense that lack precedes the lacking object. In this sense, desire ‘generates’ the phantasm that makes it possible for desire to continue – in other words, desire ‘props up’ itself *via* the phantasm.

What does Lacan say about the 'lozenge' (<>) connecting the *a* to the \$? He explains how it should be read: "the lozenge <> is to be read as "desire for," being read right to left in the same way, introducing an identity that is based on an absolute non-reciprocity" (1966, p. 653).<sup>217</sup>

Obviously, reading the lozenge or diamond bidirectionally as 'desire for' does not mean that ( $\$<>a$ ) and ( $a<>\$$ ) are strictly equivalent. The only change is, of course, the order, or, to put it differently, the position: what is read first in ( $\$<>a$ ), what holds the left-hand position in ( $\$<>a$ ) is the \$, while in ( $a<>\$$ ) it is the *a* that is read first, that holds the left-hand position.<sup>218</sup> It is in this way that we understand the non-reciprocity.

The fact that the lozenge can be read bidirectionally shows that this 'inversion' is a possible operation — see also what we said earlier about the notion of non-reciprocity and the 'à charge de revanche'. What Lacan aims at by claiming that it is an 'identity', is less clear. It probably points to the idea that the other aspects of the relation between the \$ and the *a*, apart from the position of the terms, are the same in both forms.

Lacan comments on the operation of inversion when he says: "this form turns out to be particularly easy to animate in the present case" (1966, p. 653). In other words: what Lacan is doing in the graph of the Sadean phantasm, is seeing what happens when one 'animates' the classical, neurotic phantasm by inverting it, as he already partly did in Seminar VI (1958), as we discussed earlier. In other words, he tries to answer the question: What does it mean for the subject to be in the position of object *a* instead of in the position of \$?

The following quote confirms this: "Indeed, [the *animated* form ( $a<>\$$ )] relates the pleasure that has been replaced by an instrument (object *a* in the formula) here to the kind of sustained division of the subject that experiences orders" (1966, p. 653).

We read this as follows: Sadean experience re-orders the relation between the pleasure (or the subject of pleasure) that has been replaced by or turned into an instrument (object  $a$  in the formula), and the kind of sustained division of the subject — but not just any subject: the subject that experiences orders ( $\$$  in the progression).<sup>219</sup>

As stated above, we read the Sadean phantasm as containing three instances: the promulgator or herald, the instrument or executioner and the victim or subject of the law. If we conjugate this with the symbols in the horizontal progression, it becomes clear that it is about the ‘relation’ between the instrument of the law, that is, the executioner as object  $a$ , and the subject to the law, the victim, the subject that experiences orders, the  $\$$ .

Lacan continues: “This [replacement] only occurs when its apparent agent freezes with the rigidity of an object, in view of having his division as a subject entirely reflected in the Other” (1966, p. 653).

In other words, Sadean experience not only requires a transformation from  $(\$(\rightarrow a))$  into  $(a(\rightarrow \$))$ . More specifically, it requires the agent of the phantasm, or at least its apparent agent — the executioner — to petrify, to become like an object, to reject his division, his bar. His aim, his phantasm, is to transpose, to reflect this division in the Other, to discomplete the Other, to turn the  $A$  into  $\bar{A}$ .

This step is a big one, that Lacan does not explain properly. It is strange that in  $(a(\rightarrow \$))$ , the  $\$$  stands in the first quote for “the kind of sustained division of the subject that experiences orders”, while in the second quote,  $\$$  comes to stand for “the Other”, in as much as this Other reflects the division of the subject. But it makes sense in the light of what we said earlier about the subject in the locus of the Other. We will come back to this when we analyze the full two-dimensional schema.

It is clear that Lacan is not speaking about a ‘complete’ Other here. The Other here as victim, as target of the executioner, is divided, split, barred, incomplete. This makes one

wonder if it wouldn't be better to write the perverse phantasm as  $(a \leftrightarrow \bar{A})$ . We will come back later extensively to the idea of an incomplete Other in perversion.

This analysis of the horizontal progression leaves some blind spots, that we will try to at least partly fill by analyzing its deployment into the zigzag progression and into the two-dimensional schema.

### The zigzag progression

About the zig-zag progression  $d \rightarrow a \rightarrow V \rightarrow \$ \rightarrow S$ , Lacan says the following: "The curvy line depicts the chain that allows for a calculus of the subject" (1966, p. 654).

What is clear, is that the zig-zag progression is like a chain, and that in this chain, the subject appears, both as split (\$) and as mythically un-split, as whole: (S). How this allows for a 'calculus', is not immediately obvious. What is measured or calculated by the calculus of the subject is probably pleasure. It is reminiscent of Freud's idea of a pleasure *economy*, and of Lacan's view on the whole of ethics before Kant as a maximization of pleasure in Seminar VII (1959). How this chain allows for such a calculus of the subject, is unclear. We can only conjecture that it points to the executioner as wanting to maximize pleasure without limits — as the executioner's will to *jouissance*.

Lacan continues to describe the zig-zag progression:

It is oriented, and its orientation constitutes here an order in which the appearance of object *a* in the place of the cause is explained by the universality of its relationship to the category of causality; forcing its way into Kant's transcendental deduction, this universality would base a new Critique of Reason on the linchpin of impurity (1966, p. 654).

The fact that there is an order, an orientation, is clear, the fact that the object *a* figures in it as well.

What Lacan remarks about the universality of the relationship of the object *a* to the category of causality is at first sight less obvious, but it shows the importance he accords to the idea of the object *a* as cause, an idea that will be central in Seminar X (1962). How would this causality force its way into Kant's transcendental deduction? How would this universality base a new Critique of Reason on the linchpin of impurity?

In order to answer these two questions, we will firstly briefly look at Lacan's view on causality, which is clearly inspired by Spinoza's critique on Aristotle. Secondly, we will focus on an interesting part of Bernard Baas' analysis of "Kant with Sade" (Baas, 1987, pp. 69-83), with its far-reaching claim that Lacan's aim with this text is to complete Kant by writing a Critique of Pure Desire.

### *Lacan on the cause*

Aristotle states that there are four categories of cause: material cause, formal cause, efficient cause and final cause. The material cause is about the relation between the object and the material out of which it is made: wood is the material cause of a wooden table. The formal cause refers to the relation between the platonic idea or form and the object resulting from it. It is what a sculptor has in his mind before he makes a statue. The efficient cause names the relation between an object and the action that brings it into being. As such, the sculpting is the efficient cause of the statue. The final cause is the purpose, aim, or telos, of something. The final cause of a pen is writing.

Spinoza was critical of the idea of an efficient cause. He claimed that the use of an efficient cause to explain something was doomed to an infinite regression, in which a 'primal cause', like Aristotle's 'first mover', can never be reached. Therefore, Spinozist or immanent causality sees causes as always immanent to their effects. The cause itself can only be rationally conceived departing from the network of its effects. In that sense, the effects are logically prior to their cause.

For Lacan, causality as a concept is always linked to the concept of lack. If a law describes a certain mechanism, something that leads a chain or sequence to unfold in a certain way, cause refers to the essential missing element, the lack, the thing that doesn't work, to that, what makes the sequence possible in the first place. This is similar to the Spinozist view that conceives of all causes as absent, as only present in their effects:

“Whenever we speak of cause [...] there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite. The phases of the moon are the cause of tides – we know this from experience, we know that the word cause is correctly used here. Or again, miasmas are the cause of fever – that doesn't mean anything either, there is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is only cause in something that doesn't work [de ce qui cloche]” (1969, p. 21).

This view on causality and the idea of the object *a* as lacking object, clarifies what Lacan means by ‘The appearance of the *a* in the place of the cause’ and ‘the universality of the relationship of the object *a* to the category of causality’. It is as lacking that the object *a* can ‘cause’, as residue, leftover of its effects.

Therefore, one can see the *a* as that what determines the will; as such, the *a* for Lacan takes the place of the Categorical Imperative, or of ‘the voice within’ for Kant. Where for Kant, the Categorical Imperative determines our willed actions, for Lacan the object *a* determines what we desire. The object *a* is always, universally, ‘that which causes’ for the subject.

In the Sadean phantasm, that, which the Sadean subject (reduced to the object *a*) seems to cause, is the division of the subject (the victim) in the locus of the Other.

### *Baas on the ‘new critique’*

According to Baas (1987), Lacan sees the objects of desire — Baas calls them *épithumène*, the Aristotelian term for object of desire — as contingent, as phenomenal.

He discerns a faculty of desire that the desiring subject uses to produce judgements of the form 'this object is desirable'. In the wake of Kant, Lacan would try to determine the a priori conditions of such a judgment, and to contrast this phenomenal desire to transcendental or pure desire.

For Kant, in the "Critique of Pure Reason" (1791), the absolute unconditional is God, regulating the faculty of understanding. In the "Critique of Practical Reason" (1788), God and the immortality of the soul are the absolute unconditionals that rule the free autonomous will. According to Baas, Lacan sees the Thing as the absolute unconditional that regulates the faculty of desire. In other words, he puts the absolute, unconditional Thing at the origin of the apriori faculty to desire. It is this faculty, for Baas, that provides the apriori conditions for desire, that allows the subject to desire a concrete, contingent object: the *épithumène*.

For Kant, in both mentioned critiques, the question is how to realize the unity between apriori and a posteriori, between unconditioned and empirical, to answer the question: how are synthetic judgments a priori possible? In the order of knowledge, the transcendental schemes provide this mediating element, while in the order of morality, the universalization of maxims provides this. From this starting point, Baas looks for an analogy in the order of desire, for a mediating element permitting to effectuate the synthesis between the a priori faculty to desire and the phenomenal object of desire. He finds it in the object *a* in the phantasm, which is, because it makes the link between the faculty to desire and the *épithumène*, the *cause* of desire.

While Baas, in our opinion, bends Lacan too far in order to plug him into Kant's schema, his central idea is of interest: the idea that the object *a* in the phantasm is intermediate between the Thing and the desired object. It also clarifies how the object *a* can be the *cause* of particular, concrete desire. Another benefit of Baas' intricate analysis is that it shows that "a new Critique of Reason on the linchpin of impurity" — i.e. always already perverse desire — is maybe not as far-fetched as it might seem at first sight.

### *The function of the 'vel'*

With this Spinozean view of causality and the intermediary function of the object *a* in mind, we continue to follow Lacan on the next step of his opaque commentary of the schema, which concentrates on the 'V':

Next there is the V which, occupying the place of honor here, seems to impose the will that dominates the whole business, but its shape also evokes the union [reunion] of what it divides by holding it together with a *vel*—namely, by offering up to choice what will create the \$ of practical reason from S, the brute subject of pleasure (the “pathological” subject) (1966, p. 654).

In the zig-zag progression, the V is indeed next in line after the *a*. Lacan speaks about a 'will'; will translates the French 'volonté', which has 'v' as its first letter, just like its Latin root 'velle' (to will). But the symbol V evokes here as well what Lacan calls a 'vel', the logic operator of inclusive disjunction.

The idea that the 'vel' divides something, is consistent with the idea of a 'choice', of a 'calculus', but also with the notion that it holds together, unites and reunites something.

One should notice as well that Lacan uses an uppercase V. In Lacan's mathemes, lower case letters tend to stand for concepts linked to the Imaginary, while upper-case letters tend to stand for concepts linked to the Symbolic.<sup>220</sup>

Even more intricately, Lacan also speaks about the shape of the V, which consists out of two line-fragments that connect, reinforcing the idea of holding together and (re)uniting.

Lacan says about this 'vel', about this will, that it 'dominates the whole business'. That certainly refers also to Kant's central concept of the will (*die Wille*), which for Kant is the manifestation of reason in its practical form, and as such synonymous with practical reason.



For Kant, practical reason concerns the choice between different possible actions, the determination of the will. The will, for Kant, is the moral instance as such. But what is for Kant the cause of the moral act, what is it for Kant that determines the will? As said earlier in this chapter, Kant rejects everything 'pathological' as the cause of a moral act. He points to the mere form of the law as the cause of moral actions, and the only contentless law is the Categorical Imperative, which is, however, accompanied by the affect pain. This Categorical Imperative is given to the subject in the form of a commandment, through the voice of conscience, which Lacan in Seminar X (1962) will unmask as one of the instances of the object *a*.

We recall that Lacan, through his lecture of Sade, unmasked Kant's view of the law as one in which the subject obeys an enigmatic command from 'the voice of consciousness' as a perverse one.

As such, where Kant sees the Categorical Imperative as determining the will, for Lacan it is the object *a* that has this function, which coincides with the schema. This helps to interpret in the schema the fact that it is the object *a* that precedes the 'vel', the will.

As said above, this will can also be seen as instantiated by the herald of the law in the Sadean maxim, as Sade's cruel Nature, as the enigmatic Other from whom the injunction to *jouissance* originates, or, incidentally, also as the object *a* instantiated in the disembodied, enigmatical, commanding voice.

This is in line with what we wrote above about the executioner as free, as the free Other — or at least as the instrument of the free Other.

But how is it that this will, this 'V', 'offers up to choice'? Intuitively, it would seem more logical that it would be the will that *chooses*. Probably it can be interpreted as the will, determined by the object *a*, offering the choice to the executioner, who 'has the right' to be as 'capricious' as he wants in the enjoyment of the victim's body. In other words, the will provides the command: 'Enjoy!', while the executioner chooses how to, in accordance

with his taste (in the French original, the Sadean maxim is about “the exactions I may have the taste to satiate with your body”, poorly translated by Fink as “the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body” (1966, p. 769).<sup>221</sup>

In this way, the link between the *a* and the *V* is at least partly explained, even if it creates a new ambiguity in the direction of the arrow from *a* to *V*. This is because this reasoning makes it seem intuitive to have the arrow go from *V* to *a*, in other words, for the will to determine the actions of the executioner, while the reasoning above made the direction of the arrow from *a* to *V* seem logical, proceeding from the idea that for Kant, the ‘objectless’ Categorical Imperative determines the will, and for Lacan, the object *a* determines desire. We will leave this difficulty unresolved.

Apart from partly elucidating the link between *a* and ‘*V*’, this digression on the *V* also makes it more feasible to disentangle what Lacan says about that what the *V* divides by holding it together: the subject. We will come back to the analysis of the *vel* when we deal with the two-dimensional schema.

### *Confusion between \$ and S*

We continue our analysis of the quote given above, but replace our focus from the *V* to the subject. We rather should say: the subjects, for not only the \$, but also the *S* figures in the schema.

Lacan claims that it is about creating “the \$ of practical reason from *S*, the brute subject of pleasure (the “pathological” subject)” (1966, p. 654).

Apart from this statement, and the earlier quoted idea that it is about “the kind of sustained division of the subject that experiences orders”, Lacan doesn’t provide much information about either the \$ or the *S*. Miller, in his editorial “Commentary on the Graphs” in the “*Ecrits*” (1966), is also sparse with comments on the Schema of the Sadean Phantasy. About the symbol *S*, Miller does not say more than that it is “the

subject characterized as the 'brute subject of pleasure', which we can say connotes the organism in the imaginary, from which the barred subject of the chain must be born" (1966, p. 862).

Normally, the \$ stands for the split subject in Lacan, the subject as split by the introduction of the signifier, the divided subject. As said before, we take the S to mean the mythical, complete subject, the subject that never existed, the subject from 'before' the split, the 'unbarred subject'.

With this in mind, can one see the S as "brute subject of pleasure"? Certainly: without the introduction of the split, of the signifier, of the law, of the symbolic order, the pleasure of the subject can be thought of as unlimited. It is 'brute' because untouched, uncut, uncastrated. It is *subject* to pleasure and as such the subject *of* pleasure.

But how to think of this brute subject of pleasure as a pathological subject? In the Kantian sense, this is the subject that is led by its pathos, by that which affects him. For Kant, the pathological subject is the subject that is not autonomous, that does not give itself its own law. In that sense, the pathological subject would be the subject that is not limited by the moral law. To put it crudely, the S would be the subject that is not castrated by the Categorical Imperative.

In this way, one can understand the split subject as the autonomous subject, limited by the moral law, castrated, split, barred by this limit and as such the '\$ of practical reason'.

But how can we read the relationship between the S and the \$ and their relationship to the other symbols in the horizontal progression?

A contradiction stands out. On the one hand, Lacan suggests a primacy of the S by saying that it is about 'creating' the \$ of practical reason from S, and Miller states that the \$ 'must be born' from the S. On the other hand, in the horizontal progression, the

directional arrow goes from \$ to S. This raises the question: is the S prior to the \$, or is it the other way around? We try to deduct the implications of both options.

### S prior to \$

Firstly, if one takes the \$ as standing for the victim in the Sadean phantasm, the victim can then be seen as a divided subject, as a subject whose division — between its symbolic clinging to virtue and the Real of its suffering body — is accentuated, is brought about by what the executioner does to it for the sake of *jouissance*. Seen as such, it is the torture that splits the subject, turns it into an \$.

This is also consistent with the fact that almost all of the victims in Sade's texts — before the ordeals, but also after — are pure, without any immodesty [*impudeur* in French], perfectly virtuous, ideally beautiful, invulnerable, in other words: they are mythological subjects.<sup>222</sup> The ordeals then aim at 'splitting' them.

In such a reading, the \$ would be 'created' from the S. So the executioner would be free to choose, in strict obedience to the voice of Nature, how to enjoy, how to split, how to divide, how to bring about the division of the subject. It is the torturer's immodesty that brings about the violation, the 'split' of the modesty — *pudeur* in French — of the victim.

To abbreviate this reading: the executioner (*a*), obeying the voice of Nature, the will to *jouissance* (*V*), would split the mythical subject (*S*) and turn it into a suffering, split subject (\$).

Nobus' interpretation goes in the same direction. He explains the idea that the executioner turns the S into an \$ as follows:

To enjoy, the executioner needs a subject that is not 'slave to pleasure', i.e., not 'pathological' in Kant's sense, so he turns it into 'a subject of non-*jouissance*': the victim thus becomes the \$ of [Kant's] practical reason, a rational subject who

remains strictly loyal to the dictates of its own moral law, despite the horrendous suffering that this obedience brings about (Nobus, unpublished, p. 73).

Nobus' interpretation brings one to question the strange implication that it is here the \$ that seems to be 'pure' in the Kantian sense, as not a slave to pathos, as non-heteronomous. This purity is what Kant calls holiness, a mythical state of complete accordance with the moral law that is unattainable in this earthly life. It is a strange idea that Lacan would equate such an 'ideal' subject with the \$.

Miller, however, also gives an interpretation in the sense of a priority of the S over the \$. In response to a question of Marc Strauss in his Seminar "From the symptom to the fantasy and back", Miller elaborates on the structural affinity between perversion and psychoanalysis:

There is thus, if you want, a structural affinity between perversion and psychoanalysis [...] in the care taken to obtain a barred subject, to make the division of the subject appear at the side of the analysand, to obtain \$ starting from a subject who arrives as pathologic. In "Kant with Sade" (1966), Lacan evokes precisely this subject at the onset, the subject that is the sensible subject, from which the tormentor will try to make the division appear, up to the point of his fainting. Justine is a patient. She suffers ['pâtir' in French, from the same root as pathos] from what they do to her. The term itself of patient, that we use in analysis, designates the S of the Sadean schema, that is to say the subject as pathological. It is important in an essential way to distinguish the patient and the subject proper (1982, p. 89).<sup>223</sup>

\$ prior to S

Secondly, couldn't one try to read the relationship between S and \$ the other way around, i.e. by seeing \$ as prior to S? In that way, the direction of the arrow in the schema would be done justice.

But how to interpret the \$ as prior to S?

Fukuda, in his doctoral thesis “The other side of the Sadean ethics” (2011, p. 19), reads the whole schema of the phantasm as a trajectory, the trajectory of the Sadean libertine. In his interpretation, the libertine aims at a ‘realization’. The aim of the Sadean subject would be to become an S, to realize himself as an S, as brute subject of pleasure, which Fukuda equates with a ‘black fetish’ (Fukuda, 2011, p. 24).

The advantage of this reading is not only that it does justice to the horizontal progression and to the direction of the arrow. It also clarifies the idea of the goal the subject in sadism of a ‘realization’ that Lacan develops in Seminar X (1962, pp. 92-93). Moreover, it allows one to make sense of the notion of traversal in the schema; the \$ in the schema can then be seen as the other, the victim, who’s will the libertine has to ‘traverse’ to reach his aim — this could be what Lacan aims at with the notion that *jouissance* “proposes to monopolize a will after having already traversed it” (1966, p. 651). On the other hand, this interpretation doesn’t take into account Lacan’s claim that the phantasm is about creating “the \$ of practical reason *from S*” (1966, p. 651, italics added).

Another, although far-fetched reading would be that the Sadean experience tries to *undo* the split of the victim. One could see the Sadean experience as aiming to turn the *victim* as ‘normal’, split subject, into a subject that can experience a *jouissance* without limits, i.e. turn it into a “brute subject of pleasure”, an S? In this sense Sadean experience would aim to *remove* the bar, try to *repair* the split subject, to make the victim into an unsplit, uncastrated subject? To correct the non-libertarian ways of the subject and turn it into a libertarian by showing it how to enjoy, beyond what it thought of as pleasure, to make it find its real desire, i.e. total *jouissance*? In this sense, the victim can be seen as the Other of the subject in sadism, and the aim of the subject in sadism as completing the Other — as removing the bar of the barred Other.

This reading has the advantage of being concordant with Freud’s notion of the pervert as disavowing the (m)Other’s — and thus his own — castration or incompleteness. But it has the disadvantage of being at odds with the idea of the executioner wanting to reflect *his division* in the Other.

Fink gives yet another interpretation. Describing the graph of the Sadean phantasm also as a trajectory, he says that the subject in sadism aims to:

move from his state of alienation—here in the bottom right-hand corner of the graph (where we see the sadist as split subject who has come into being in language and had his needs transformed into alienated desire)—to the higher state of wholeness or completeness denoted by the unbarred S (Fink, 2014, pp. 119).

In other words, Fink sees the four symbols in the schema all as standing for the Sadean subject, in a certain 'stage' of his 'trajectory', with as its final aim to become a non-barred, non-castrated subject.

Remarkably, Nobus, who's interpretation in favor of 'S prior to \$' we discussed above, gives also material that enables the opposite interpretation:

"Sadly, [the libertine's] will to jouissance [...] always has to pass through the divided subjectivity of their victims, which Lacan formalizes as:  $V \rightarrow \$ \rightarrow S$  [...] one could say that the libertines fantasize about radically negating the impact of the symbolic order, with a view to re-creating a pre-symbolic state of being. Sadly, the only thing they can do (as opposed to fantasize about) in order to achieve this aim is torturing virtuous human beings" (Nobus, unpublished, p. 79).

We will not decide which of both symbols — S or \$ — is 'really' prior. Instead, we will try to draw on the richness of the different interpretations to further clarify the relationship between the \$ and the S later.

The more in detail one analyses the horizontal progression within the schema of the Sadean phantasm, the more contradictions and imprecisions seem to pop up. But in the same movement, the overall structure becomes clearer. It is, by now, at least clear that in the schema of the Sadean phantasm, it is about the executioner in the place of object a, who, in the name of the Other, tortures the victim, an experience that aims at bringing

something about that is related to the subject's split and at disavowing the executioner's lack.

### The two-dimensional schema

The two-dimensional schema enriches the two progressions in two ways. Firstly, it allows to connect the *a* to the \$ by two different trajectories. Secondly, it allows to distinguish between two 'sides' of the schema: the left side with *a* and *V* and the right side with \$ and *S*.

#### *Two ways of connecting the a and the \$*

In the zigzag progression, the *a* precedes the *V* in the directed arrow, while in the horizontal progression, *a* is connected to the \$ by the lozenge. Thus, in the two-dimensional schema, the *a* is connected to the \$ in two ways: by an arrow passing by *V* (i.e.  $a \rightarrow V \rightarrow \$$ ) and by the lozenge on the horizontal line (i.e.  $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ). This raises the question of the relationship between both ways of connecting *a* and \$.

In Seminar XI (1964), Lacan develops an explicit link between the *vel* and the lozenge. He sees the lozenge as horizontally split in two halves. The halves are the *v*, standing for disjunction (this is what Lacan calls the 'vel') and the  $\wedge$ , standing for conjunction. Lacan sees disjunction and conjunction as two operations, respectively alienation and separation (1964, p. 209).

Alienation is the result of a forced choice between two partly overlapping alternatives, as in 'Your money or your life!'. Whichever way the subject confronts this choice, it involves a forced sacrifice — to be precise, the sacrifice of what is *common* between both alternatives, of what is in the intersection, the overlap between both alternatives (Lacan 1964, p. 212; Biswas, p. 140).



The idea of alienation makes it probable that the 'vel' can be seen as what we get when we 'unfold' the lozenge that connects the *a* and the \$. This throws more light on what Lacan says about a 'choice' in the dense sentence on the vel cited higher, where he speaks about "offering up to choice what will create the \$ of practical reason from S, the brute subject of pleasure" (1966, p. 654). Being confronted with the torment, with unbearable pain or with a violation of its modesty, is for the victim — which, mind, is an idealized, i.e. unbarred victim — like being confronted with a forced choice, that forces him to give up what is direst to him: that, what allows him to be a 'mythical', unbarred subject, that what makes him a brute subject of pleasure, i.e. his object *a*. The result is that the victim — by 'forced choice' — turns into a suffering, split subject.

But why would this be the phantasm of the subject in sadism? Why does the executioner want to split the victim? The executioner wants — or needs — to prove that the victim, however beautiful and immaculate he or she may be, is (at least potentially) split, is marked by perverse desire. As Lacan writes, "desire is the henchman of the subject's split" (1966, p. 652).

Let us trace the consequences of a partially contrary hypothesis. What if the executioner would really be aiming to 'capture', to 'extract' the object *a* from the victim \$, in order to complete, to unbar, to restore the victim to a mythical state unmarked by desire? With this extracted object *a*, the executioner could complete himself, or the Other, which, in the end, — phantasmatically, of course — comes down to the same: by completing the Other, the Sadean subject would 'prove' that he himself is complete, because an unbarred Other would guarantee him as an unsplit subject.

In this sense, the desire of the Sadean subject would be to appropriate the object *a* of the victim, in order to restore it to the Other. Hence the phrase to be found in "Juliette"<sup>224</sup> (Sade, 1797, 195) and cited in Seminar X: "the characters, completely occupied in slaking on these chosen victims their greed for torments, enter into this bizarre, singular and curious trance, indicated, I repeat, on several occasions in the text of Sade, which is

expressed in these strange words [...]: 'I had', cries the tormentor, 'I had the skin of the cunt'" (1962, p. 146)

Rabaté, in an interesting chapter on "Kant with Sade" (1966), also cites this passage, commenting that "The Sadean fantasy aims at turning the subject inside-out in the name of the Other's enjoyment" (2001, p. 101).

The result of the process is that the Sadean subject identifies with the object *a*. In his striving to complete the Other, he loses his subjectivity, and petrifies, becomes an object. He becomes that which is needed to complete the Other, that which lacks in the Other, which is reminiscent of what Lacan said in Seminar IV (1956) about the subject in fetishism becoming the phallus of the m(Other). This clearly structurally links the subject in fetishism and sadist/masochist positions. Petrifying into the complement of the Other's lack is the price the subject in perversion has to pay for being 'reconstituted', i.e. being 'made whole', being 'unbarred', completed. But by disavowing the division, the subject in perversion loses his subjectivity: he becomes an object.

To explain it in yet other terms, to do justice to the notion of alienation as 'forced choice': the Sadean subject, confronted with the forced choice between being split or complete, between being an \$ or an S, chooses to be the S. This is clearly paralleled by the choice Lacan discussed in Seminar IV (1956): to have the phallus (resulting in neurosis) or to be it (resulting in fetishism).

In other words, the 'choice' to be complete, to be an S, to be the phallus, is characteristic of the subject of perversion in general.

But, and that is the problem of the perverse 'solution', there is no S. There is only an \$ and the object *a*. The result is that the subject in perversion chooses to become S, but becomes the object *a*. In that sense, he is alienated by his forced choice, but in a different way than the victim: he is reconstituted because he is not split any more, but alienated all the same by having had to sacrifice something in his choice: i.e. his subjectivity. To rephrase it yet again, using this time the notion of the instrument: the price

he has to pay for this reconstitution is that he becomes nothing but the instrument of jouissance — which is, by definition, the jouissance of the Other. Commenting on the schema, Lacan condenses all of this in one sentence: “Thus it is clearly Kant’s will that is encountered in the place of this will that can only be said to be a will to jouissance if we explain that it is the subject reconstituted through alienation at the cost of being nothing but the instrument of jouissance” (1966 p. 654).

### *Two sides of the schema*

As said, the deployment of the horizontal progression in two dimensions allows the splitting of the schema in two sides — that is, if one omits the ‘d’: the side of the *a* and the *V* on the left hand, the side of the \$ and the *S* on the other.

Our starting point for this claim is what Lacan says in Seminar X (1962), where Lacan presents a very similar schema, the ‘schema of sadist desire’, which we will return to in our analysis of that Seminar. There, Lacan reads the left side of the schema as the side of the (as yet unconstituted) subject (the *S*), and the right side as the side of the Other (the *A*) (1963, p. 92). This idea of a side of the subject and a side of the Other is a notion that pervades the whole of that Seminar and its multiple schemas.

We refer also to Miller’s already cited analysis, where he says that in the schema of the Sadean phantasm, the \$ ‘complements’ the *S* and the *a* ‘complements’ the *V*<sup>225</sup> — in other words, Miller claims at least that the \$ and the *S* on the one hand and the *a* and the *V* on the other, belong together.

Nobus in his study on “Kant with Sade” also refers quite a few times to the side of the subject and the side of the Other, one time naming them respectively the more sadistic side of the libertine and the more masochistic side of the victim (unpublished, p. 15).

How to read the schema of the Sadean phantasm as split in two loci? How to read the *a* and *V* as the side of the subject, and the \$ and *S* as the side of the Other?

It helps to collapse the horizontal schema back to the kernel of the schema, the  $a \leftrightarrow \$$ . As remarked earlier, this kernel can be seen as consisting of two positions linked by the lozenge. The left position is the position of the subject, and the right position the position of the Other.

In that sense, the generic or neurotic phantasm ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ) relates how, for the neurotic subject, the relation between the subject and the Other is structured. It allows the neurotic subject to subsist in the untenable situation in which he is confronted with the Other — with the enigmatic desire of the Other, in other words, with the Other as real. He does this by ‘covering over’ the enigmatic desire of the Other with the object  $a$ , by substituting the object  $a$  for the Other. In other words: by substituting for the Other that, what would bring jouissance, that, what would make the untenable situation possible. As Lacan puts it in Seminar XX:

The object  $a$  [is] the object that could satisfy jouissance [...] in which the full, inscribable relationship of the one with what remains irreducibly the Other is supposedly inscribed [...] The partner [...] of the subject [...] is not the Other, but that which is substituted for it in the form of the cause of desire (1972, p. 126).

In the Sadean phantasm, ( $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ), it is different. Of course, it also relates how, for the subject in perversion, the relation between the subject and the Other is structured. It also allows the subject in perversion to situate itself in the untenable situation in which the subject is confronted with the Other as real. But for the subject in perversion, this relation is structured differently. Instead of ‘covering over’ the enigmatic desire of the Other with the object  $a$ , he positions himself as, he identifies himself with the object  $a$  — with that, what can bring jouissance to the Other. This positioning of the subject in perversion as the object  $a$  explains why in the schema, the object  $a$  is in the locus of the subject.

At the same time, the subject in perversion does not ‘cover over’, does not substitute the Other with the object  $a$ . Instead, he covers over the Other with the partner of the subject in perversion, its ‘victim’ in the schema. As such, the partner for the subject in perversion is not immediately the Other, but that which is substituted for it in the form of the partner.

It is the aim of the subject in perversion to bring jouissance to the partner as split subject, to turn him or her into a complete subject, unmarked by the signifier and the law. This 'removing of the bar' can be found in a very plastic manner in Sade's "Juliette" (1797) in the passage on 'the skin of the cunt' we cited earlier.

In other words: in order to make the untenable situation possible, the subject in perversion substitutes his partner for the Other, because the partner is that what the subject in perversion can bring jouissance to. It is by bringing jouissance — terrible, unsupportable jouissance — to his partner that the subject in perversion tries to bring jouissance to the Other. The underlying aim is to complete the barred Other, in order to make the untenable situation possible. This is, in the final analysis, Lacan's abstraction of Freud's notion of the pervert's disavowal of the absence of the m(O)ther's phallus.

This reading makes it credible that the S can stand both for that what the libertine wants to become by 'traversing the will' of the \$ *and* for that what he tries to turn his partner into. In other words, in the schema of the Sadean phantasm, the S is the final aim, the unbarred subject covering over, substituted for the unbarred Other.

Another tentative reading could see phantasmatical jouissance — in other words: desire — as playing the role of that what stabilizes the relationship between the subject and the Other. One could omit to determine who's jouissance is at stake in the relationship. The whole problematic of jouissance becomes smoothened when one stops asking this question. To put it differently: there is no subject of jouissance. When there is jouissance, the subject fades.

Another notion that gives support to such a reading, is the notion of the symmetry between the subject and the other, which underlies the mirror stage, and which is generalized to the symmetry between the subject and the Other in the chapter "Rings of string" in "Encore" (1973). There, Lacan characterizes the object *a* as "the prop, substitute-prop or substitute for the Other" (1973, p. 127). He speaks of a strict equivalence of the object *a* as substitute for the Other when he says that "the reciprocity

between the subject and object *a* is total. For every speaking being, the cause of desire is, in terms of structure, strictly equivalent, so to speak, to its bending, to what I have called its division as a subject” (1973, p. 127).

From this perspective, it becomes understandable that Lacan can claim that “It’s only speaking bodies [...] that come up with an idea of the world as such. The world [...] is but a dream, a dream of the body in so far as it speaks, for there’s no such thing as a knowing subject” (1973, p. 126). This could be interpreted as a monistic idealist claim from Lacan, where it not that this undoubtedly only describes what happens in the phantasm. In the phantasm, a defense against the Real, it is about the subject that dreams up the world, made up of objects *a* that cover up the Other covering up the Real. And only in that way can one make sense of the idea that the structure of the phantasm — the neurotic as well as the Sadean — is intrasubjective.

Let us now apply this idea of the two symmetric loci in the kernel of the phantasm to the two-dimensional schema of the Sadean phantasm.

What happens in the locus of the subject?

One finds here the Sadean subject, who turns itself into the executioner of the will of nature, the will to jouissance, the enigmatic command of the Other (*V*), and as a result petrifies into an object (*a*). Thereby, he strives to complete this incomplete-because-desiring Other, to complete him by offering himself as lacking object to him.

What happens in the locus of the Other?

In the process, the Sadean subject strives to ‘drill a hole’ in the locus of the Other, to ‘split’ the victim (*S*), but — and this counterintuitive ambiguity is essential — at the same time to ‘undo’, remove the split or the bar of the victim (*\$*).

Doing so, he strives to make the Other — as the V, as will to jouissance, as the Sadean cruel Nature — command him... and, by fulfilling its command, to complete the Other. And, by the same ambiguity as above, by doing so, the Sadean subject also shows the incompleteness of the Other.

How to make sense of these ambiguities? Of the idea that the Sadean subject tries to split *and* to unsplit the victim, and, at the same time, to complete *and* to discomplete the Other?

Once more, we propose to leave the aporias unresolved, and conclude that at this time in the work of Lacan, there is no satisfying topology of the subject and the Other that can picture their relationship adequately. Moreover, this is one of the points that the re-examination of perversion by Lacan in Seminar X (1962) will not resolve.

Lacan concludes this part of his text in which he comments on the graph as follows: “Thus Kant, being interrogated “with Sade” [...] avows what is obvious in the question “What does he want?” which henceforth arises for everyone” (1966, p. 654).

Kant, in other words, is being tested ‘with Sade’. Thereby, the analysis of Sade seems to be merely instrumental to Lacan’s main purpose, which is an attack on Kantian ethics. By ‘testing’ Kant through (‘with’) Sade, Lacan makes Kant answer the question: ‘Che voi?’, ‘What does he want?’. Put to the test of Sade, Kant ‘admits’ that his “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788) aims at the reconstitution of the subject, and that this only works ‘through alienation’ — by alienating the subject of its pathos — and at the cost of ‘being the instrument of jouissance’, that is, at the cost of perversion.

This interpretation of the Kantian moral subject — that is, the Kantian subject of the *first* formulation of the Categorical Imperative, the Kantian subject cut off from its pathos — as perverse, is in line with the analysis of Zupančič in her *Ethics of the Real* (2000). It is the perversion of the ‘banality of evil’, as Hannah Arendt describes in her analysis of the

Eichmann process (1963). At the same time, almost as a collateral benefit, testing Kant with Sade allows, as we showed, for major advances in the theory of perversion.

### A note on the 'quarter turn': a forgone assignment

On p. 656, Lacan says: "Let me give my readers an assignment here". Then, he speaks about a 90-degree rotation of his graph, which is printed as follows:

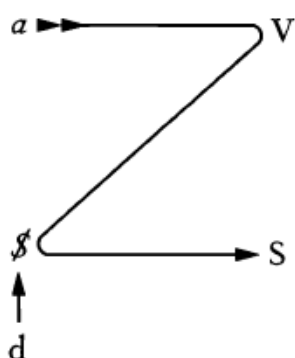


Figure 8 The 90-degree rotation of the graph

As the accompanying commentaries are, in our opinion, too sparse and too obscure, we will leave Lacan's assignment unfulfilled here. Any development would be pure speculation. We suffice with pointing out that, in Seminar X (1962, p. 177), Lacan refers back to the schema, in equally obscure terms. The difference is that in Seminar X (1962), Lacan makes it clear that this 90-degree rotation turns the schema into the schema of the masochist: "Sadism is not masochism back to front. This is not a reversible couple. The structure is more complex [...] one passes from one to the other by rotating it 90 degrees, and not through any symmetry or inversion" (1962, p. 177).

We will not follow Lacan's problematic 90-degree rotation.<sup>226</sup> Instead, we will, in our next section on Seminar X (1962), concentrate on the schema of the Sadean phantasm to come up with a theory for perversion in general.



## Conclusion

In “Kant with Sade” (1966), Lacan returns to the core question we studied in our section on Seminar VII (1959): what does it mean for the subject to take the position of the object *a* in view of causing the Other’s jouissance?

We studied this question through two key moments: the reformulation of the Sadean maxim and the graph of the Sadean phantasm. Both give us insights in the structural constitution of the subject in sadism – insights that will be generalized to masochism and to perversion in general in our next section on Seminar X (1962).

The Sadean maxim, ‘the maxim that proposes a rule for jouissance’, shows us more about the relation of the subject in sadism with its Other. We followed Lacan’s articulation of this relation with the concepts of non-reciprocity, kerygma, pain and the object of the law.

As it concerns jouissance, the maxim is non-reciprocal par excellence. In the maxim, the participants – the herald, the executioner and the subject – are in topologically complex positions, ruled by the radical non-commensurable relation between the split subject and jouissance.

The proclamation or kerygma of the Sadean maxim instates literally the radical rejection of the pathological, combined with a purification and formalization of the law. Paradoxically, this process of de-pathologization and formalization engenders anyhow an object of the law, as if ex-nihil: the perverse command ‘Enjoy!’, understood by Lacan as a form of the object *a*: the disembodied voice that originates, as Lacan makes Sade show, in the enigmatic desire of the Other.

The pain provoked in the victim, is both an epiphenomenon of this proclamation of the law to enjoy, and a means to an end: the ‘violation of the modesty’ of the victim, bringing the — always perverse — desire of the subject out in the open. At the same the victim,

we showed, stands in for, covers, the Other: it is in fine at the Other's enjoyment that the subject in sadism aims.

With the graph of the Sadean phantasm, Lacan tackles the same problem from another angle, using not a chain of signifiers (as in the maxim) but a matheme.

The kernel of the graph of the Sadean phantasm shows us how in the phantasm of the subject in sadism, the positions are reversed in comparison to the phantasm of the neurotic subject; in the Sadean phantasm, the subject is in the position of object *a*. Lacan dialectizes his analysis of the graph with the concepts of cause, the 'vel', the barred and unbarred subject and Other.

The cause for Lacan is always immanent in its effects. As such, Lacan sees the object *a* as cause for the split subject. This allows him to see the subject in sadism, in the position of object *a*, by violating its modesty, as causing the splitting of the victim as subject.

The vel, overdetermined as the Will, as the logical operator for disjunction and later (in Seminar XI (1964)) as alienation, stresses the choice that the Other forces upon the subject in sadism: how to 'Enjoy!'. The subject in sadism takes the position of instrument of this command, laying bare the perverse desire of his victim, in view of completing the Other, by providing him the jouissance he lacks.

The concepts barred/unbarred subject and complete/uncomplete Other drive the whole of "Kant with Sade" (1966). As said, Lacan fails to provide a satisfying topology of their respective relations. Lots of contradictions remain: according to the perspective one takes, one can argue that the subject in sadism tries to split and/or unsplit the victim, the Other, or himself. In other words: the clarification of the relation between the subject in perversion and its Other, that we distilled out of "Kant with Sade" (1966), is far from perfect. Firstly, masochism is out of the picture and sadism as a subject structure is not even treated directly. Secondly, the relation between the lack of the subject and of the Other stays opaque.

We choose to retain from the reading of “Kant with Sade” (1966) the characterization of the subject in sadism as attempting to complete the Other, which allows us to make the link with fetishism. We see Lacan’s view on sadism as an abstraction and a generalization of his view on fetishism. Freud found the traumatic confrontation with the Other’s desire in the perception of the uncanny absence of the maternal phallus. The fetishistic choice, for Freud, consists in the disavowal of this lack in the (m)Other. For Lacan, as we saw, it consists in the choice to be what the mother lacks: her missing phallus. Here, Lacan’s structural model for sadism, which will be generalized to all perversions, leaves behind the phallic interpretation. That what the subject in perversion strives to complete the Other with, is not any more the phallus, but the object *a*.

In Seminar X (1962), the relationship between the subject in perversion and its Other will find a more stable form. The stress will be put on the lack of the subject in perversion with which he strives to complete the Other and, last but not least, the Sadean phantasm will be generalized to sadism and masochism which will be shown to be structurally alike, and to perversion in general. The subject in perversion will be seen as aiming to complete the Other with its own lack.

We conclude with two quotes from Fink and Miller:

This schema, which illustrates the sadist’s trajectory [...], suggests that if the sadist can convince himself that the Other exists, he can move from his state of alienation—here in the bottom right-hand corner of the graph (where we see the sadist as split subject who has come into being in language and had his needs transformed into alienated desire)—to the higher state of wholeness or completeness denoted by the unbarred S. The latter is a sort of utopian moment of a subject who has not been barred or castrated in his struggle with the Other; his pleasure has not been relegated to the mere pittance meted out to your run-of-the-mill speaking being (Fink, 2014, p. 112).

The Sadian phantasm unilaterilizes the subjective division on the side of the Other. It is even this that is constitutive for perversion. Perversion consists in making the subjective division surge in the Other. Exhibitionism and voyeurism are no different in this respect. The perverse operation comports the violation of the modesty of the

Other. To violate the modesty of the Other is to divide him subjectively. It is that what is efficient in the object as dividing the subject. It is on that idea that Lacan will build the key to desire: the object as cause of the division of the subject (Miller, 1982, p. 82).

Our reading combines both seemingly unrelated interpretations. While Fink stresses the strife of the subject in sadism to become an S, Miller focuses on the attempt of this subject to discomplete the Other. We hope to have shown that both interpretations are not incompatible.

## PART 7

Lacan on sadism and masochism in Seminar X:  
completing the lacking Other

“To render *a* to him from whom it comes, the big Other, is the essence of perversion”  
(Lacan, 1968, p. 301).<sup>227</sup>

## Introduction

In this part we will study what Lacan has to say about sadism and masochism as paradigmatic perversions in Seminar X (1962). We confront our interpretations with secondary sources, most importantly with Fink (1996) and Swales (2004).

Anxiety is only the starting point of this Seminar. Behind and beyond it, the main subject is the object *a*. Over the course of the Seminar, the contours of the object *a* gain clarity. Anxiety is seen as the key to the object *a*, as a privileged way of access to it. It is Lacan's development of the object *a* that provides us with the key to think sadism and masochism.

Seminar X (1962) is the Seminar in which Lacan comes to see the object *a* more and more as real. Where before the object *a* was characterized as *agalma*, as the object goal-of-desire, here it unfolds as the object cause-of-desire. Where the object *a* was thought of first as imaginary, then as symbolic, here it is situated in the intersection of the Symbolic and the Real. This becoming real of the object *a* is accompanied by what Miller reads as a critique of the Imaginary, of the mirror stage, and of the Symbolic, the signifier (Miller, 2005, pp. 16-19).

In the first and preliminary chapter of this part, we minutely trace this becoming real of the object *a*. We begin by introducing some important concepts and notions: the barred Other and the object *a* as desiring. Then, we turn to the schema of division, in with which Lacan analyses the object *a* in its relations with *S*, *\$*, *A* and *Å*. Here, *a* becomes the unimaginarizable, unsymbolizable remainder of the encounter between the subject and the Other. In Lacan's rearticulation of the optical schema, which, we will argue, fails, the object *a* is articulated with imaginary castration – written as minus phi ( $-\phi$ ) –, and, ultimately, comes to replace it as a more generic abstraction of the always already lost object. While this articulation is retaken in Lacan's analysis of anxiety, it becomes even more clear that the *a* gets precedence over minus phi. It is ultimately the replacement of the second concept, specifically linked to castration by the first, linked to lack in general,

that will allow Lacan to think perversion *beyond* castration, *beyond* phallic lack. Finally, we analyze how the object *a* comes to be thought of as *cause* of desire. We dissect Lacan's unorthodox conception of the cause as lack and as real and, importantly, as linked to the body as real. As Lacan puts it: "cause is already housed in your innards and figured in lack" (p. 215). We expose the link between the object *a* as cause and Freud's idea of the aim of the drive.

In the second chapter of this section, we focus on how this becoming-real of the object *a* allows us to think perversion in general. We juxtapose the phantasms of the neurotic and of the pervert. Both strive for the completion of the lacking Other: the neurotic by baiting him with a fake object *a*, the pervert by identifying with the object *a* that must complete the Other. This allows us to differentiate structurally between neurosis and perversion.

In turn, we draw the attention to Lacan's commentary of Freud's case study of a young female homosexual patient. Lacan generalizes the coincidence of law and desire he finds in Freud's case study and shows that the pervert is not the subject that enjoys without boundaries. As neurosis, perversion is a structure that needs a law to limit jouissance — a defense against the imminence of the Thing. While in neurosis, the subject desires according to the law, in perversion, desire presents itself as what lays down the law, and thus as subversion of the law, as satisfaction without restraint, as will to jouissance. But, this is only so on the surface: in fact, in perversion, desire is the support of the law, of the complete Other as the source of the law, a bringing in action of a law that stops on the path of jouissance, a defense against the Real.

This leads us to study, in the third chapter, how the subject in sadism and in masochism both strive for the Other's completion.

First, we concentrate on the subject in sadism, on Lacan's schema of sadistic desire and on his relation to anxiety. Elaborating sadism, Lacan foments a new schema of sadistic desire which we compare in detail with the schema we discussed in the part on "Kant with Sade" (1966). We discuss the place of the object *a* in both schemas and argue that



the subject in sadism, as split subject, not only strives to realize himself as an unsplit, mythical subject, untainted by any lack, but also that in the process, he aims to realize, to complete the Other, to turn  $\bar{A}$  into A.

Secondly, we look at how the subject in masochism takes the position of the object in relation to the Other and how he relates to anxiety. Lacan pictures the subject in masochism as he who strives to make an Other appear whose desire lays down the law, by making the object *a* as voice or superego appear at its locus. Lacan analyses this in connection with Freud's case study of the young homosexual woman. It shows that the subject in masochism *sacrifices* himself by making of himself, in a passage à l'acte, the object *a*, as a dejectum, that comes to fill what lacks in the Other — a supreme guarantee, that makes the Other's desire law.

Finally, we conclude with an analysis of the symmetries and asymmetries of both positions. We zoom in on Lacan's claim that the sadist looks on the surface for the Other's anxiety, but ultimately strives for the Other's jouissance, while the masochist looks on the surface for the Other's jouissance, but ultimately strives for the Other's anxiety. We argue that this way of putting things is convoluted and confusing, and that it risks masking what is common to both sadism and masochism – and, indeed for the perverse subject structure in general: it is ultimately about the completion of the Other by supplementing him with the pervert subject's own lack: the object *a*.

As such, the Seminar on anxiety (1959) not only allows us to formulate a structural theory on sadism and masochism, but also on perversion in general. In an abstract and general manner, perversion can be thought of as the subject structure that deals with jouissance — with the traumatic intrusion of the Real — by supplementing the lack in the Other with the subject's own lack — figured in the object *a*.

## The becoming-Real of the object *a*

Lacan introduces his tenth Seminar (1962) by situating anxiety between desire and jouissance in a network of signifiers made up by references to philosophers and to Freud.

The philosophical references are mostly to Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, who all dealt with the concept anxiety and where at the center of intellectual debate in France in the late fifties.<sup>228</sup> Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre each conceive in their own way of anxiety in a phenomenological fashion, as a subject's lived relation to what one could call an anterior ontological freedom. Lacan's approach, as we will see, is dramatically different: he approaches anxiety not phenomenologically, but structurally, through the subject and its constitutive lack.

Freud's text "Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety" (1926d) is a major reference throughout the Seminar. In this essay, Freud formulates a 'second' theory on anxiety, abandoning the notion of anxiety as an effect of a physiological cause. He differentiates anxiety from fear; while fear has an object, anxiety is without an object; it is rather a mode of distressed anticipation.<sup>229</sup> Lacan will base himself on this idea to develop the concept object *a* further; he will read it, as we will see, as the object that anxiety is not without – the object *a*.

While Lacan claims that the network of signifiers he weaves in order to capture anxiety only makes sense because it makes anxiety appear in its mazes (1962, p. 9), it has the advantage of clarifying the referential context within which Lacan thinks about anxiety.

Lacan sees anxiety, like Freud, as an affect, as a signal, as present on the surface, while the signifiers that link to anxiety, are repressed. Anxiety is like a frame that signals the imminence of an object. The object that anxiety signals, is structurally unknowable, ungraspable: it is the object *a* as real.

While anxiety is the title of the Seminar and the center of the introduction to it, it is not its central concept. Lacan uses it mainly as a privileged entrance to probe deeper, more fundamental concepts. Over the course of the Seminar, Lacan is puzzling with the concepts of the barred Other, the unbarred Other, the object *a* as cause of desire and the possibility of the subject being in the position of object *a*. These concepts and notions gain clarity and contour through their elaboration in a number of formulae and through, on which we concentrate in this chapter.

We focus on the notions of the barred Other and the object *a* as desiring, on the schema of division, on Lacan's rearticulation of the optical schema, on his analysis of anxiety and finally on how the object *a* comes to be thought of as *cause* of desire.

The clarity and contour these elaborations offer, will enable Lacan to think perversion as the structure in which the subject identifies with the object *a* in view of completing the barred Other and of covering over anxiety. This will be the main topic of our second chapter. In the third and final chapter, we will deal with sadism and masochism, which evolve as two of the different possibilities that incarnate this structure. We show that, while the subject in masochism tries to fill the hole in the Other by offering his own body, the subject in sadism tries to do the same by becoming the instrument that offers the body of the victim to the Other.

### The incomplete Other and the object *a* as desiring

When Lacan zooms in on anxiety and on the desire of the Other, he illustrates their relation with his famous fable of the praying mantis:

Myself donning the animal mask with which the sorcerer in the Cave of the Three Brothers is covered, I pictured myself faced with another animal, a real one this time, taken to be gigantic for the sake of the story, a praying mantis. Since I didn't know which mask I was wearing, you can easily imagine that I had some reason not to feel reassured in the event that, by chance, this mask might have been just what it took to lead my partner into some error as to my identity (1962, pp. 5-6).

Anxiety, in other words, is what appears when the subject is confronted with the enigmatic desire of the Other, when he doesn't know what the Other wants, nor what he is for the Other — he could be taken for a male praying mantis whose head gets eaten after copulation.

This desiring Other is written as  $\bar{A}$ , as the barred Other, “because it's the Other at the point where it's characterised as lack” (1962, p. 24). The barred Other is present in Lacan's work from Seminar V (1957) onwards, where it was characterized as the Other marked by the signifier (p. 289), and in Seminar VI (1958), where Lacan introduces the notion that “there is no Other of the Other”, i.e. that the Other is incomplete, because there is a signifier missing in it (p. 206). In other words, the Other is thought of purely as symbolic.

This is also the case in the first chapters of Seminar X (1962). Colette Soler sees the  $\bar{A}$  as it is used there as follows: “ $\bar{A}$  is the other of the discourse, one that speaks as barred, meaning that we do not know what he wants” (2006, p. 33).<sup>230</sup>

Towards the end of Seminar X (1962), the Other changes position when Lacan introduces the notions of the real Other and of jouissance. He clearly stresses that “the Other involved in jouissance [...] is the real Other” (1962, p. 182).

Maybe the best way to characterize the barred Other is as an Other that desires because it lacks, just like the barred subject is desiring because of his lack.

Lacan develops this notion of lack as the support of desire into the idea that object *a* is the cause of desire. He even characterizes the object *a* as desiring: “It's an object *a* that desires” (1962, p. 25). While the notion of a desiring object *a* is difficult to make sense of at face value, the possibility of the subject being in the position of the object *a* concords with what we said about “Kant with Sade” (1966), notably that the subject in perversion takes the position of object *a* in the Sadean phantasm.

Colette Soler sees this ‘desiring *a*’ as the lack of the subject that desires. According to Soler, “we can be this object affected with desire” (2006, p. 26).<sup>231</sup> She sees the *a* as that what is left of appetite or vitality — one could translate this as libido — after the subject is split by the signifier. In a certain sense, one *is* the split subject *and* the object *a*. This becomes clear in the schema of the division.

### The schema of the division

Lacan introduces an important schema, the first schema of the division, which links the aforementioned concepts in a satisfying manner that will allow Lacan to picture the relationship between the subject, the object *a* and the Other in sadism and masochism.

$$\begin{array}{c|c} A & S \\ \hline \mathcal{S} & \mathcal{A} \\ a & \end{array}$$

Illustration 1: First schema of the division

In the course of the Seminar, three more schemas of the division will follow, with only minute alterations. They are of less theoretical interest, but witness to the importance Lacan accords to this schema.

In his commentary on the first schema of division, Lacan defines the object *a* as the residue of the division of the originaire — complete — Other by the mythical — complete — subject. The quotient of the division is the barred subject, “stamped with the unary trait of the signifier in the field of the Other” (p. 27).

Object *a* is described as a residue, as that what is lost during the original constitution of the subject in its encounter with the Other. In a system centered on the signifier, and still tributary to the imaginary, Lacan describes the *a* as belonging to the irreducible Real, as

a lack that is unspecularizable, a lack that symbol nor image can fill. We read this as an elaboration of Lacan's notion of privation in Seminar IV (1956), where he called privation a 'real hole'.

The original constitution of the subject is described as a division. As a classic algebraic operation, division of whole numbers is a relation between four terms: the dividend, the divider, the quotient and the remainder. In this relation, the dividend equals the divider times the quotient plus the remainder.

We find that reading Lacan's schema as the representation of a classical, scholarly 'long division' is clarifying. The English reader may have difficulties in interpreting this schema as a classic 'long division', for in the Anglo-Saxon world, the long division is represented differently than in France and in most of continental Europe:

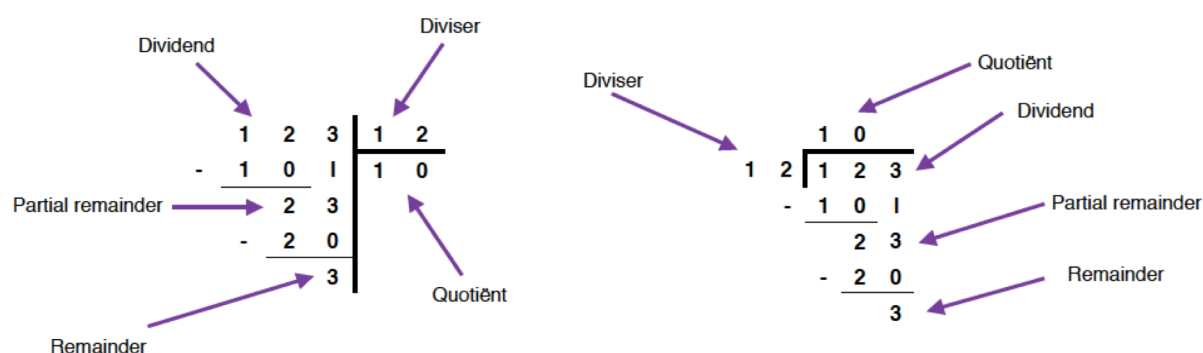


Illustration 2: Continental (left) and Anglo-Saxon (right) representations of the long division

We remark that in both representations of the long division, one also find partial remainders — remainders that will be further divided.

Reading Lacan's schema as based on the 'French' long division, we get:

Dividend	A
Divisor	S
Quotient	$\bar{A}$
Partial remainder	\$
Remainder	a

Table 12 Algebraic symbols in the graph of Sadean desire

Read as such, in the schema of the division, the complete, originaire Other (A) is 'divided' by the mythical, unsplit subject (S), or, as Miller puts it, 'interrogated by the subject'.<sup>232</sup> As for this mythical, undivided subject (S), Collet Soler sees it as the same instance as the little delta at the basis of the graph of desire, as the subject before it enters language (2006, p. 19). Later in the Seminar, Lacan calls S the subject of jouissance (p. 173). This is supportive of the idea of S *before* the division as not yet having lost the objet a, and as such not yet desiring, still pure jouissance.<sup>233</sup>

Vanheule (2011a) gives an instructive analysis of the schema of division (pp. 129-131). When he focuses on the dialectics of the Other (A) and the subject of jouissance (S), he describes the Other purely as symbolic: "The Other still refers to the 'locus' or 'the treasure trove of signifiers' [...] through which the subject is articulated" (p. 128). Analyzing the subject of jouissance, he stresses the real character of the S. He sees three characteristics: it denotes the corporeal side of being, it is enigmatic and real and, last but not least, it is, as real body, capable of experiencing jouissance. This makes him claim that in the operation of division, "the Other, or the Symbolic, is the point of reference, upon which the primitive subject, or the Real, is imposed" (p. 130).

While we entirely agree with the notion of the S as real, we stress that Lacan sees the Other in Seminar X (1962) also as real, as shown in our preceding paragraph. The same goes for the barred Other ( $\bar{A}$ ), the Other as desiring, which, as we will see, is crucial to think masochism and sadism in a satisfying way.

But let us continue with our analysis of the division. In the process of this division of the A by the S, a (partial) remainder is generated: the split subject (\$). In other words: by questioning the Other — or, by being questioned by the Other, which comes down to the same — the subject splits. As A and S are incommensurable, the division does not only yield a quotient, but also a (partial) remainder. The quotient here would be the barred Other ( $\bar{A}$ ), i.e. the part of A that is commensurable with S. The partial remainder is the \$, the subject split by the complete, mythical Other, split by the signifier: “First off, you find A, the originary Other as locus of the signifier, and S, the subject as yet nonexistent, who has to situate himself as determined by the signifier” (1962, p. 27). Lacan describes the resulting \$ as “stamped with the unary trait of the signifier” (p. 27).

As most metaphors, our image is not perfectly extendible. Reading the schema of the division as a classical long division, fails to account for the next step. In order for the long division to correspond to the totality of Lacan’s schema, the partial remainder would need to be divided by the divider yet again, i.e. the \$ would need to be divided by the S to yield the *a* as ‘final’ remainder, which is clearly nonsense. Moreover, in a long division, the partial remainder results only from a division of a part of the dividend by the divider.

Partially breaking with the image of the long division, we propose to conceive *both* the \$ and the *a* as what remains after the division of A by S. The only difference with the schema interpreted as a long division is that we interpret them both as ‘final’ remainders, without a hierarchization in ‘partial’ and ‘final’. As final remainders, they are not commensurable.

In brief, in our interpretation, both the object *a* and the \$ are final, incommensurable remainders of the division of the A by the S. Represented graphically, this would give the following schema:



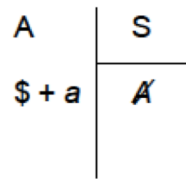


Illustration 3: Schema of the division with \$ and a as incommensurable remainders

The characterization of the object *a* as incommensurable remainder, as rest, as leftover resulting from the questioning of the Other by the subject, is one that Lacan repeats quite a few times throughout the Seminar. The \$ as resulting from the intrusion of the signifier (or of the A, the treasure trove of signifiers) in the S, the subject of jouissance, is a commonplace in Lacan's teaching.

This is also in line with what Lacan says when he introduces the schema, referring back to the concept of the One (le 'Un') from Seminar IX (1961): "this One, to which [...] the succession of signifying elements, in so far as they are distinct, are reduced, does not exhaust the function of the Other" (p. 26). In other words: the One does not exhaust the Other, because there is a remainder: the object *a*. Something in the Other escapes every attempt at symbolization. Of course, that what escapes, is the unsymbolizable object *a*.<sup>234</sup>

Two asides. Firstly, since the Other is always incomplete, the A is as much a mythical, proto-Other as the S is a mythical, proto-subject. Secondly, Lacan speaks here about the division of the A by the S, of the questioning of the Other by the subject. While Lacan always stresses the precedence of the A over the S, their relationship is, in our opinion, always characterized by a certain symmetry. In that sense, the idea behind the schema could not only be read as the division of A by S, but at the same time as the division of S by A. In that sense, it would figure the encounter of the subject of jouissance and the absolute Other, both being divided by their encounter.

Our reading is not fully concordant with Lacan's own commentary on the schema. Firstly, Lacan indicates the divided subject as the quotient of the division: "With regard to the Other, the subject dependent on this Other is inscribed as a quotient" (1962, p. 27). In the schema, it is not the subject, but the  $\bar{A}$  that is clearly in the place of the quotient. The idea of the subject as quotient is also inconsistent with what Lacan says next: "It's not necessary the case, if I may say so, that he [the subject] slices the Other up" (p. 27). We take this to be a mistake by Lacan: that what slices the Other almost up — almost, because the operation leaves a remainder — is clearly the divider, not the quotient. In that sense, S should be indicated as the divider here, not the quotient.

Secondly, our reading of the schema as a long division does not account for the fact that Lacan splits his schema in two sides, which he calls — to the left — the side of the Other or, alternatively, the objective side, and — to the right — the side of the subject: "Both [the  $\$$  and the  $a$ ] stand on the side of the Other, because the phantasm, support of my desire, is in its totality on the side of the Other. What stands now on my side is what constitutes me as unconscious, namely  $\bar{A}$ , the Other in so far as I don't reach it" (1962, p. 27). As Miller notes, this idea of "sides" traverses the whole Seminar, in the sense that Lacan tries to find out on which side to place the object  $a$ : "One time, he places it on the side of the Other, the other time on the side of the subject" (Miller, 2003, Lesson 16, p. 12).

The crux of the schema is undoubtedly, and Lacan is very clear about this, the fact that the  $A$  and the  $S$  are incommensurable, and that their encounter leaves behind an irrational remainder in form of the  $a$ : "There is, in the sense of division, a remainder, a leftover. This remainder, this ultimate Other, this irrational entity, this proof and sole guarantee, when all is said and done, of the Other's otherness, is the  $a$ " (Lacan, 1962, p. 27).

In other words, there is something in the Other that is not the signifier: the object  $a$ . In other words: the Other is not entirely symbolical. The  $a$  appears here, as we already said — and this will be further elaborated in this Seminar — as unspecularizable and unsymbolizable, and thus as real.

As the topology of the mutual relationships between S, A, \$,  $\mathcal{A}$  and *a* are the ground on which the rest of the Seminar is build, and as our interpretation of this topology is the ground on which our understanding of sadism and masochism is based, we propose to restate the schema in another form:

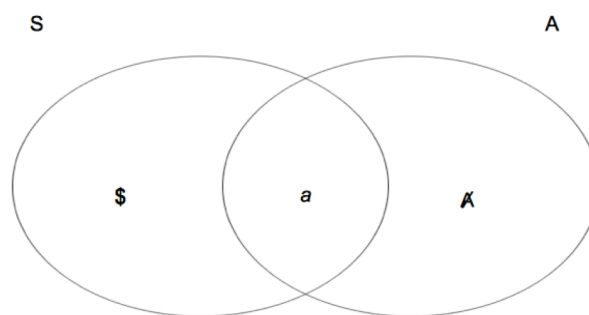


Illustration 4: Restated schema of the division

The benefit of this Eulerian schema, in our opinion, is fourfold. Firstly, it accentuates the symmetry between A and S (and between  $\mathcal{A}$  and \$). Secondly, it shows that the effects of their encounter are threefold ( $\mathcal{A}$ , *a* and \$). Thirdly, it illustrates that the A and the S *both* split in their encounter (A into  $\mathcal{A}$  and *a*, S into \$ and *a*). Finally, it indicates that both  $\mathcal{A}$  and \$ have one thing in common: that what they lack, the *a*, which serves as a copula between both.

Safouan's reading of the schema of the division gives support to our point of view. He stresses the idea that not only the mythical subject S constitutes itself as \$, as marked by the signifier, by the encounter with A as locus of the signifier, but that the A doesn't come out of the encounter untarnished either: the A is suspended to a guarantee that is lacking, and in this sense barred. Moreover, as in our schema, he sees the *a* as emerging 'between' the \$ and the  $\mathcal{A}$ : "Between the subject, we could say "Otherified" and the Other, barred, the *a* emerges, the 'pound of flesh'" (Safouan, 2001, p. 245).<sup>235</sup>

Harari (2001) has an interesting perspective on the relationship between the Other and the object *a*, that corroborates ours. He explains that “if the Other seeks my loss, it does so because it is trying to reconstitute its own object *a*. It desires a fragment of myself” (p. 111). This corroborates our reading of the encounter between the subject and the Other as generating a lack in both.

We will use this schema as our starting point for the further exploration of Seminar X (1962), in order to highlight the relations between A,  $\mathbb{A}$ , S, \$ and *a* in perversion.

### Variations and shortcomings of the optical schema

Re-articulating the optical schema that stems from his teaching dealing with the mirror-stage,<sup>236</sup> Lacan tries to account for the object *a* in its status as real, as unimaginarizable and unsymbolizable remainder of the encounter of the subject of jouissance with the Other. He tries to articulate this development with the earlier, central concept of  $-\phi$ . In Lacanian algebra, while the  $\phi$  stands for the imaginary phallus, the  $-\phi$  stands for castration, for the absence, the loss, the lack of  $\phi$ . With the introduction of  $-\phi$  in the optical schema, Lacan wants to make the schema pivot around the notion of castration, while at the same accounting for the newly minted character of the object *a*.

Lacan claims that the imaginary phallus or  $\phi$  “is not represented at the level of the imaginary, but [...] cut out of the specular image” (p. 39). He says further that it appears in the mirror as a lack, a minus, a blank. In other words, it appears as negativized, as absence, as a hole, as  $-\phi$  (pp. 38-39). He also calls the  $-\phi$  a remainder of libido not invested in the specular image (p. 38).

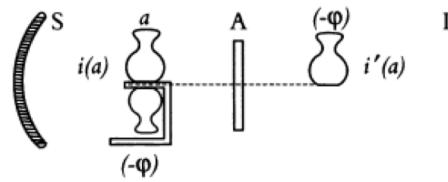


Illustration 5: The rearticulation of the optical schema (add page n°)

In our opinion, the schema is problematic because the two central concepts –  $a$  and  $-\phi$  – are partially overlapping. This overlap appears most clearly in Lacan’s striking depiction of anxiety: “Anxiety emerges when a mechanism makes something appear in the place of [...]  $-\phi$ ), which corresponds, on the right-hand side, to the place that is occupied, on the left-hand side, by the  $a$  of the object of desire” (p. 41).

When one keeps in mind that Lacan claims of both the object  $a$  and the  $-\phi$  that they have no mirror-image, one gathers that the  $-\phi$  seems to be merely a place in the image that appears in the plane mirror, a place where something is absent, where something is missing. That what can appear in that place, and, appearing there, provokes anxiety, is, however, the object  $a$  — so Lacan claims.

Further on, Lacan will claim that anxiety appears when “lack happens to be lacking” (p. 42), i.e. when what is missing in  $-\phi$  appears there anyway. Logically, what would appear where  $-\phi$  lacks, should be  $\phi$ , in the sense that the negation of something negative should be positive. Logically, when castration is absent, the phallus should (re)appear. Not so for Lacan: it is the object  $a$  *in general* that appears when the *phallic* lack comes to lack.

An added problem is, of course, that the  $a$  is here presented as something that *can* appear in the mirror, that can be ‘positivized’, while Lacan also claimed the contrary, i.e. that the  $a$  has no mirror image.

In our opinion, a better interpretation of the formula that anxiety appears when lack comes to lack, is to say that jouissance (in its instantiation as anxiety) appears when

desire (thus: lack) is filled with the object *a*, i.e. when the lack causing desire (as object *a* cause-of-desire) comes to lack.

When Lacan re-expresses the  $-\phi$  as libidinal reserve, he makes an explicit link with the body and jouissance, “autistic jouissance” (p. 45). The explicit link between these concepts is interesting, because jouissance and the body as real will become, in the rest of the work of Lacan, intimately linked with the object *a*. It is a question of one concept acquiring characteristics of the other.

Colette Soler tries to interpret the difference between the  $-\phi$  and the *a* as follows: while *a* is the part of the libido, that invests itself in the image,  $-\phi$  is the rest of the libido that does not enter the Imaginary (2006, p. 27). But this characterization of the difference between both concepts is unsatisfactory. It is difficult to conceive of an absence, a lack or a whole that gets *invested* in the mirror image. Moreover, the possible objects *a*, as Lacan lists them, are all auto-erotically invested objects: the breast, the scybalum, the phallus, the gaze and the voice.

Another indicator of the confusion between  $-\phi$  and the object *a* is the fact that in the optical schema, the  $-\phi$  is characterized as a remainder, while in the schema of the division, it is the object *a* that is characterized as such.

It is clear that the co-existence of the  $-\phi$  and the object *a* in Lacan’s rearticulation of the optical schema is problematic. Because of the tension between  $-\phi$  and the object *a*, the rearticulation fails. At the same time, this failure is fruitful. As Miller puts it: “In the first half of the Seminar, the optical schemas are both exploited and cracked” (2005, p. 18). This exploitation and cracking result in the consolidation of the real status of the object *a*, which gets privileged over the  $-\phi$ . This latter concept will disappear into the background in Lacan’s teaching. This is shown most clearly when Lacan constitutes the catalogue of objects *a*, which consists of *all* the objects that remain auto-erotically invested. The phallus will only be one of these objects, an instance of the object *a*, amongst others. While the object *a* evolves from object of desire, to the initium of desire and finally to

cause-of-desire, to generic lack, the phallus loses its privilege; in Seminar XI (1963), it will even disappear from the list of objects *a*. On the other hand, something of the basic structure of the optical schema is withheld by Lacan, and reused, as we will see, in the schemas of the pervert's and the neurotic's phantasms.

To resume, the logic of the mirror device and of lack as merely phallic, fail to do justice to the object *a* as real, to generic lack. This movement in Lacan's thinking is far from innocent. It is radical. It is what Miller sarcastically calls "bye bye Oedipus" (Miller, 2003, Lesson 15, p. 11).

Most importantly for the topic of our interest, it is precisely the privileged position of the object *a* as cause-of-desire that will make it possible for Lacan to evolve from fetishism as paradigmatic perversion, articulated around the phallic lack, to sadism and masochism, articulated around a notion of lack that goes beyond castration.

## Anxiety

Throughout the Seminar, Lacan's conceptualization of anxiety centers more and more around the object *a* and less and less around castration. This movement, in parallel with what Miller called "bye bye Oedipus", can be interpreted as generalization of Freud's notion of castration anxiety into anxiety-as-jouissance, his notion of generic lack as a generalization of Freud's notion of castration, and his concept of the object *a* as a generalization of Freud's object-loss.

Lacan holds, like Freud, that anxiety is a *signal*. But Lacan takes position against Freud in a radical fashion. While for Freud, in analysis, castration anxiety is unsurmountable, Lacan claims that "it really isn't castration anxiety that [...] constitutes the neurotic's ultimate impasse" (p. 45). For Lacan, anxiety becomes a signal of the nearness of the object *a*. Later in his teaching, Lacan will claim that an analysis can be terminated, that

the subject can ultimately encounter the object *a* and discover a new, particular kind of jouissance.

Lacan describes the common reaction of the subject of neurosis to this anxiety: “What the neurotic shrinks back from is not castration, but from turning his castration into what the Other lacks. He shrinks back from turning his castration into something positive, namely the guarantee of the function of the Other” (Lacan, 1962, p. 46). While this description is still fashioned in phallic terms, we see the notions of ‘lack of the Other’ and ‘guarantee of the Other’ appear. Lacan will articulate these terms more and more around the object *a*, and less and less around castration.

This idea of the ‘guarantee of the Other’ is deployed in “Subversion of the Subject” (Lacan, 1966) as big phi ( $\Phi$ ), the symbolic phallus. Here, in Seminar X (1962), where the lack of the subject generalizes from  $-\phi$  to the object *a*, the completion of the Other generalizes from  $\Phi$  to the restitution of the object *a* to the Other. As Miller puts it: “In ‘Subversion of the Subject,’ the  $-\phi$  of castration as imaginary is manipulated in a way so as to produce the  $\Phi$  of jouissance-impossible-to-negativize. In the Seminar on Anxiety Lacan will remain on this track in which jouissance is, in effect, a function impossible to negativize [...] when this positivity of jouissance is expressed by petit *a* in the Seminar on Anxiety, it is in some way deprived of a signifier” (Miller, 2005, p. 40).

In the same article, Miller claims that while Lacan already dealt with the missing object before Seminar X (1962) — most importantly in Seminar IV (1956) —, it was always dealt with as something that was still possible to articulate and name, something that belonged to the Symbolic, while in Seminar X, the missing object becomes real.

The idea of ‘guaranteeing the function of the Other’ in the quote above is of interest because it paves the way for Lacan’s analysis of perversion: that what the neurotic shrinks away from, the completion, the guarantee of the Other with his own castration is exactly what the pervert strives for. This completion of the Other is sought by the pervert by filling the lack of the Other with the object *a*. This is also the reason why in Seminar IV



(1956), with the conception of object lack as essentially phallic, fetishism could be conceptualized, but not sadism and masochism. While the subject in fetishism completes the Other by identifying with the missing female phallus, the subject in sadism and the subject in masochism will strive to do the same by identifying, each in their own way, as we will show, with a non-phallic object *a*. As we will see, the completion of the Other is the pervert's strategy to try to deal with anxiety, while he at the same time tries to make the Other anxious. It is the anxiety of the Other that must, in the pervert's mind, bring jouissance to the Other, a jouissance that is deemed to complete the Other. As Nguyễn expresses it: "There where something is missing in the Other, the pervert places an object *a*" (2006, p. 123).<sup>237</sup>

This also presupposes that anxiety is a form of jouissance, one of the possible manifestations of jouissance. While Lacan, to our best knowledge, never makes this claim, and while in a certain way, stating it thus is a shortcut Lacan's elaboration of the concept anxiety, it is a claim that seems crucial to us to understand not only Lacan's use of the concepts anxiety and jouissance, but also, as we will see, of the way they are interlinked for the subject of perversion.

## Cause and Ziel

Throughout Lacan's analysis of the object *a* in its new status, he stresses the heteronomy of the subject. The subject is heteronomous because he 'is' as well an object *a*, not barely a subject – he is the *S* split into  $\$$  and *a*. Lacan elaborates this notion of heteronomy in connection with the notion of the cause. It is this heteronomy of the subject, substantiated in the object *a*, that will come to the fore in Lacan's analysis of perversion, where the pervert will strive to take the position of the cause of the Other's desire – in view of escaping it.

His points of reference are some crucial observations on the relation between anxiety and the object *a*. Firstly, anxiety is not without an object. Secondly, the object anxiety is

not without, is the object *a*. Finally, anxiety provides access to the object *a*. As Lacan puts it: “anxiety is the sole subjective translation of this object” (1962, p. 100).

It is no coincidence that it is precisely when Lacan calls the object *a* the cause of desire, that he comes to speak about sadism and about masochism. As Freud’s discovery of the death drive led him to a re-elaboration of these paradigmatic perversions, Lacan is led to do the same when he discovers the object *a*. Both perversions are the subjective structures in which the function of the object *a* as cause of desire appear most clearly (Swales, 2004).

When Lacan uses the concept cause, he does so in a very special sense, as we described in the part on “Kant with Sade” (1966). Without understanding what he means with cause, one can’t make sense of the notion of the object *a* as cause of desire. And, by extension, the notion of cause is necessary to understand how the object *a* can function as cause of desire in sadism and masochism.

It is also no coincidence that it is in this Seminar, which deals with what probably is the most important concept of phenomenology, anxiety, that — against the phenomenologists — the intentionality of desire is reversed. While phenomenology stresses since Husserl that there is no thought that is not turned towards something, Lacan’s focus is radically different. From the *aim* of desire, he turns his attention to the *support* of desire, from *support* of desire it quickly turns to first the *initium* and then to the *cause* of desire: “To set our target, I shall say that the object *a* — which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire — is to be conceived of as the cause of desire” (1962, p. 101).

At the same time, this difference in focus includes a critique on the object relation theorists, as so often the aim of Lacan’s critique. While they dedicate their entire attention to the subject-pole of the subject-object relation, and claim that is possible for the subject to enter into an adequate relation to the object, Lacan shifts the attention to the object-

pole and to the idea that the object is intrinsically inadequate to the subject — and vice versa.

He refers to the notion of cause, which needs re-thinking in order to make better sense of the object *a* 'as cause'. As elaborated earlier, cause is rethought in its Spinozean sense, as immanent, circular cause, or, even: lacking cause or lack as cause. In Lacanian terms, cause it is that what lacks in the chain of signifiers.<sup>238</sup>

In this context, Lacan links back to “Kant with Sade” (1966), when he speaks about “the radical relation of the *a* function, the cause of desire, with regard to the mental dimension of cause [...] I wrote it up in a point that you can find in the article “Kant with Sade” (1962, p. 281). In the same article, we indeed find the *a* as the initium of the schema of Sadean desire.

Lacan describes the function of the cause as “the shadow cast, or better still, the metaphor of the primordial cause — the substance of this function of cause — that the *a* is inasmuch as it precedes any phenomenology, the *a* that we have defined as the remainder left over from the constitution of the subject in the locus of the Other in so far as the subject has to be constituted as a barred subject” (p. 284).

In the chapter entitled “Buddha’s Eyelids”, Lacan presents the classical – non-Spinozean – efficient cause as the syncope of the object, as a strategy of the intellect to cover over the object *a*, and, ultimately, the real. According to Lacan, western philosophy and science as a whole is for a large part an attempt to cover over the object *a* by the efficient cause.

While earlier he claimed that the object *a* is a cause — the cause of desire — here he proceeds the other way around, saying the cause *is* the object *a*: “if this cause proves to be so irreducible, it is in so far as it is superposed, as it is identical to [...] this part of ourselves, this portion of our flesh, which necessarily remains snagged in the formal

machine [...] As a lost object, at the different levels of the bodily experience where its cut occurs, it is the underpinning, the authentic substrate, of any function of cause” (p. 215).

In other words, when one looks for an explanation, an answer to the ‘why’, the answer is always the object *a* — and ultimately, the Real.

But this is not all. Lacan also stresses the bodily aspect of the cause — and thus of the object *a*: “This bodily portion of ourselves is, essentially and functionally, partial. It should be remembered that this portion is a body and that we are objectal, which means that we are only object of desire as bodies”.

This makes it understandable that Lacan can claim that we *are* — we should add ‘always also’ — object *a*. This is what Lacan means when he calls the subject heteronomous.

Lacan further links the object *a* as part of the body to desire: “desire always remains in the last instance desire of the body, desire for the Other’s body” (p. 215). He uses another powerful metaphor to figure the cause as linking lack and the body: “cause is already housed in your innards and figured in lack” (p. 215). As Miller puts it: the object *a* gives body to jouissance: “In the Seminar on Anxiety, jouissance is liberated from the signifying straitjacket of its phallic prison and demonstrates, on the contrary, that the objects *petit a* give body to jouissance” (2005, p. 39).

Lacan’s elaboration of the object *a* as cause leans on Freud’s conception of the drives. As we showed in the part on Freud, sadism and masochism, Freud described the drives as having a goal (Ziel) and an object (Objekt):

The aim [Ziel] of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct... The object [Objekt] of an instinct is the thing in regard to which or through which the instinct is able to achieve its aim (Freud, 1915c, p. 122).

In other words, the aim of a drive is constant, while its object is variable.

Lacan stresses that for Freud, the object is 'eingeschoben', i.e. it is 'sled in', or 'passed somewhere'; it "steals away from the level of our grasp" (Lacan, 1962, p. 102). For Freud, while the object is 'äusseres', outside, the aim is 'inneres', inside the body, where it finds its satisfaction.

For Lacan, the object *a* as cause of desire is clearly linked to the notion of the *aim* of the drive for Freud — or, to be more precise, to the state of stimulation at the source of the drive. This, in turn, is linked to the reserve of libido that is not invested in the object, as shown before. The object as *object of desire*, as *agalma*, on the other hand, is linked to the idea of the object of the drive for Freud.

It also becomes clear here why the object *a* is intimately linked to the body.<sup>239</sup> It finds its basis in the fact that for Freud, the aim of the drive was linked to the erogenous zones. Lacan extends and abstracts the notion of erogenous zone to the objects that are potentially separated from the body – the breast, the scybalum, the phallus, the gaze and the voice. It is there that the drive originates, it is there that the drive is "caused", it is there that the lack as real is situated.

Lacan links the distinction inneres/äusseres (inside/outside) to the object *a*, stressing that the *a* is an "outside that stands prior to a certain internalization" (1962, p. 102), prior to an internalization that it is located before the subject, when he grasps himself in the locus of the Other – "in *x*" as Lacan puts it (p. 102).

This elaboration of the object *a* as cause-of-desire, as *Ziel* of the drive, will enable us to elucidate and to question the function the object *a* as cause in perversion in general and in sadism and masochism in particular.

## The function of the object *a* in perversion

In this chapter, we will focus on the functioning of the object *a* in perversion. We will first see how Lacan situates the barred subject and the object *a* differently in the phantasm of the neurotic and the phantasm of the pervert. This will provide us with a theoretical means to differentiate neurosis and perversion. Then, we elucidate the particularity of the pervert's propensity to a passage à l'acte by zooming in on Lacan's commentary on Freud's case of the young homosexual. Finally, we examine the importance of the relationship between desire and the law for the pervert.

But in order to advance the understanding of how Lacan theorizes perversion with the object *a*, we first need to take position on two issues that Lacan doesn't deal with directly, but that leave some of his crucial concepts clouded in ambiguity. These issues are the following: Firstly, is the object *a* a cover for lack or is it that which is lacking? Secondly, who's lack is the object *a* related to?

Lacan does not clearly take position on the first issue. At one time, the object *a* is merely what covers over lack, at other times it is the lacking object or lack itself. We will leave this contradictory use of the term object *a* as it is, but we think it is necessary to at least point out this ambivalence as an underlying presupposition of our commentary on Lacan. In other words: in our opinion, the object *a* can stand for lack *and* for what covers lack. Swales puts it this way: "After Lacan began referring to object *a* as an object in the real, however, he sometimes used object *a* to refer to an imaginary order semblance or façade of the real order object *a*" (2012, p. 47).

For the second question, the question of who's lack the object *a* is related to, Freud's handling of castration anxiety in the context of fetishism is revealing. For Freud, it is the perception of the missing female phallus that has — nachträglich — its repercussions on the subject. The castration of women becomes as well equal to the castration of the subject. In our opinion, Lacan generalizes this. Firstly, the lack of the phallus becomes lack in general, the object *a*. Secondly, the idea that the lack in women — in the m(Other)

— becomes the lack in the subject gets generalized into the notion that the lack in the Other is equal to the lack in the subject. The first schema of division illustrates this transitivity of lack: when the S and the A are ‘confronted’, the result of their dialectical relation is a barred \$, a barred  $\mathbb{A}$  and the object  $a$ , which can be seen as the missing copula between them. In other words, the  $a$  is what is lacking to the Other *and* to the subject. This is what we wanted to convey with our Eulerian schema. Lacan is never entirely clear about this, and that is probably the reason why Miller says that throughout the Seminar, a question about the object  $a$  persists: “on what side is this object? Is it on the side of the subject or on the side of the Other?” (Miller, 2005, p. 31).

With the specification of our standpoint relative to these two questions, we are ready to address Lacan’s developments about the function of the  $a$  in perversion.

### The phantasm of the neurotic and the phantasm of the pervert

The schemas of the pervert’s and the neurotic’s phantasm are presented as two derived versions of Lacan’s reworking of the optical schema.<sup>240</sup> They both picture the phantasm as a relation between \$ and  $a$ . But while the neurotic and the pervert both aim to fill the lack in the Other, they apply different strategies, based on the different functioning of the object  $a$  in both structures.



The phantasm of the pervert (left) and the phantasm of the neurotic (right) (Lacan, 1962, p. 49)

### *The phantasm of the neurotic*

In the schema of the neurotic's phantasm, the two terms of the matheme of the neurotic phantasm ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ) figure, but the matheme itself is not directly recognizable in the layout of the schema. The fact that while the complete subject (S) is at the left side of the mirror, both the  $a$  and the  $\$$  are to the right, presents a difficulty.

What Lacan says about the reworked optical schema, throws some light on this difficulty: "If the subject could really, and not through the intermediary of the Other, be at the place labeled I, he would have a relation with [...] the object of his desire,  $a$ " (p. 41).

In the original optical schema, this 'I' figures the Ego-Ideal, situated to the right of the mirror. This explains that in the phantasm of the subject of neurosis, the subject can imagine himself to move to the right side of the mirror, can image to do away with the mirror/Other and can imagine to have a direct relationship with the object  $a$ , here still denoted as the object of desire. The fact that the neurotic 'wishes' to be on the same side as  $a$ , makes sense. What he sees on the other side of the mirror, is an image of a fulfilled, completed subject (S).

Lacan also presents the phantasm of the neurotic as the neurotic's wish to stop the threat of the Other's desire: "the formula of the phantasy,  $\$$  desire of  $a$ , can be translated into the following perspective — that the Other faints, swoons, faced with this object that I am, a deduction I reach on account of being able to behold myself" (Lacan, 1962, p. 49).

We read this phantasm of the fainting of the Other as a way to image the Other's completeness. Recall that in the optical schema, the left side pictures the side of the subject, the right side the side of the Other. The  $a$  and the  $\$$  appear here thus both in the locus of the Other. Because the object  $a$  is restored to the side of the Other, the Other can be thought of as completed, just like the neurotic subject.



Our vision on the underlying process is the following: confronted with the desire of the Other — and thus with an Other that is incomplete — for there is no desire without lack — the subject wants to fill that lack.

We will show later how the pervert deals with the object *a* in order to fill that lack, and discuss here how Lacan develops the way that the neurotic deals with the object *a* in the context of a disquisition about the nightmare. He links the nightmare to the mythological figures of the incubus and the succubus which he calls “questioners”. The riddle these figures pose in the form of an opaque signifier, is linked in turn to demand: “This question furnishes the most primordial form of what I called the dimension of demand” (p. 61).

Lacan connects demand to the drive and its matheme as ( $\$ \leftrightarrow D$ ), to be read as “barred *S*, cut of capital *D*, demand” (p. 65). He uses this matheme to explain the neurotic’s phantasm: “the phantasy ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ) is presented in a privileged way in the neurotic as ( $\$ \leftrightarrow D$ )” (p. 65).

In other words, for the neurotic, the object *a* and demand are intrinsically linked: demand is what the neurotic puts at the place of the object *a*, it is the camouflage, the veiling of the object *a*. Demand, to go short, is what protects the neurotic against anxiety: “anxiety is linked to the fact that any demand... always has something illusory about it with respect to what preserves the place of desire [...] demand comes unduly to the place of what is spirited away, *a*, the object” (p. 65).

This is why Lacan calls the object *a* in this function for the neurotic a ‘*postiche*’, a ‘false’ object *a* (Vanheule, 2011b). The neurotic acts as a conman with his phantasm, toys with his phantasm, uses it as bait to lure the Other.

The neurotic’s phantasm is what serves him best to defend himself against anxiety, to cover up anxiety. Lacan explains that the object *a* which for the neurotic has this function in his phantasm “becomes him much like gaiters do a rabbit [...] It succeeds in defending him against anxiety precisely to the extent that it’s a *postiche a*” (p. 50).

Lacan says, referring to the dream of the beautiful butcher's wife, where the caviar she keeps from her husband functions as an object *a* that she wants to keep in reserve, that for all neurotics, "The object *a* functioning in their fantasy, which serves them as a defense against their anxiety, is also, contrary to all appearances, the bait with which they hold onto the Other" (pp. 50-51).

This 'use' of a 'false' object *a* by the neurotic, transferring it to the side of the Other, using it to 'trick' the Other, covers over what the *real* object *a* is for the neurotic. For Lacan, the real object the neurotic searches, is a demand from the Other: "He wants the Other to beg him" (p. 52). And what the neurotic can't do, is give the Other "nothing", "his anxiety": the neurotic does not want to give up his anxiety.

Lacan stresses that the 'spirited away' *a*, that this loss, this lack, this 'nothing', is constitutive for the functioning of the neurotic's desire. That is also the reason why "the neurotic's fantasy is entirely situated in the locus of the Other" (p. 50), i.e. why both \$ and the – false – *a* are pictured to the right of the schema. Remark as well that the idea of placing the phantasm in the locus of the Other provides a link with the division schema, where the left side, with the A, the \$ and the *a*, is seen as the side of the Other.

This passage about the specificity of the neurotic's phantasm and the specificity of the function of the object *a* in it, is crucial to differentiate the subject of neurosis from the subject of perversion, as we will show.

### *The phantasm of the pervert*

In the schema of the pervert's phantasm, one partially recognizes what Lacan claims to be "the redistribution of the terms of the phantasy" (p.41). As in the matheme of the perverse phantasm ( $a < > \$$ ), as it appears in "Kant with Sade" (1966), \$ and *a* have traded places. In "Kant with Sade" (1966), however, one finds the link between *a* and \$ in another form. While here, the link is provided by the mirror, in "Kant with Sade" (1966) it

was represented by the stamp (<>). Elsewhere in this Seminar, Lacan links the mirror and the stamp — both are seen as a cut. And as the mirror, in the optical schemas and in the schemas of the neurotic and the perverse phantasms, stands for the Other, one could say that the phantasm pictures the relationship between the \$, the *a* and the Other.

In the schema of the perverse phantasm, the *a* is in what Lacan calls in its 'right place'. Lacan explains:

For the pervert, things are, if I may say so, in their right place. The *a* is right where the subject can't see it and the capital \$<sup>241</sup> is in its place. This is why one can say that the perverse subject, whilst remaining oblivious to the way this functions, offers himself loyally to the Other's jouissance (1962, p. 49).

The fact that the \$ and the *a* are 'in their right place' – i.e. in reference to the optical schema and in contrast to the phantasm of the neurotic, and, also according to the matheme ( $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ) – is easy to see. It is also understandable that the pervert, as he has no view of the whole double-mirror set up, is oblivious of his own functioning. As Swales put it: "the side of the subject is marked by ignorance" (2012, p. 103).

Here also, we find a link to the schema of the division. The differentiation between the side of the Other and the side of the subject is also applicable to the schema of the pervert's phantasm, as it was to the Sadean phantasm, as we explained in the part on "Kant with Sade" (1966). Here, as in the Sadean phantasm, we identify the left side of the schema with the *a* and the unsplit subject, the right side with the *S* and the \$ as the side of the Other. The difference with the schema of the Sadean phantasm was that there, the *V* also figured on the side of the subject.

The second idea from the quote above, to offer oneself loyally to the Other's jouissance, is less clear. It is a crucial idea, around which much of the interpretations of Lacan's vision on perversion turn (Fink, 1996; Miller, 2006; Swales, 2012). It is a thought that Lacan, as I showed, developed in "Kant with Sade" (1966), and that resurfaces here. But Lacan seems unable to articulate it with the double mirror device, and leaves it uncommented. We will come back to this crucial notion later, when we develop the idea

that bringing jouissance to the Other is equal to completing the Other: an Other that enjoys, does not desire anymore, knows no lack. In other words: offering himself loyally – as object  $a$  – to the jouissance of the Other is the way of the pervert to complete the Other.

While Swales (2012) would probably agree with the previous sentence, she would certainly not with the one before. She distinguishes between an Other of jouissance and an Other of perversion. When she sums up the key aspects of perversion, one of them is the notion that “The subject encounters the lack in the Other only in terms of jouissance and not in terms of desire” (p. 55). We firmly disagree with the characterization of jouissance in terms of lack: in our opinion, jouissance is the absence of lack, and lack is synonymous with desire. Without this differentiation between desire and jouissance, a decent understanding of perversion is impossible.

Verhaeghe (2008, p. 417) writes the matheme for the fundamental phantasm of perversion differently. He writes it thus:

$$a \leftrightarrow A$$

He stresses that “the perverse subject fully identifies with the object of enjoyment that the Other is lacking” (Verhaeghe, 2008, p. 417). This is indeed an interesting alternative to the matheme  $a \leftrightarrow \$$ , for it stresses the lack in the Other, alternatively to the stress put by Lacan on the lack of the subject. But when Verhaeghe also differentiates between neurosis and perversion, he claims that the subject in perversion has no lack: “the neurotic wants something from the Other that that subject lacks. The subject in perversion begins from the opposite position: there is no lack; on the contrary, the pervert has something to offer” (Verhaeghe, 2008, p. 426). While we agree with the notion that the pervert disavows his lack, we do not follow Verhaeghe in claiming that he has none. As a subject, the pervert strives to fill his lack – and the lack of the Other.

Swales follows Verhaeghe in writing the perverse phantasm as  $a \leftrightarrow A$  : “in lieu of considering the entire schema Lacan provides in “Kant with Sade” (1966), the perverse fundamental phantasm is better written as  $a \diamond A$ , or the object-cause of jouissance in relation to the Other” (Swales, 2004, p. 93).

As an aside, we remark on the incongruity of the notion ‘object-cause of jouissance’. While quite some authors seem to find the differentiation of desire and jouissance difficult or impossible, when one sticks to the simple idea that desire is what the subject does when the object  $a$  is absent, and jouissance what happens when it is present, there are no such difficulties.

Interestingly, Swales (2004, p. 93) develops the pervert’s fundamental phantasm one step further, coming to write it as follows:

$$a \leftrightarrow A$$

[...] just as the obsessive does everything in his power to deny his own lack, such that his fundamental fantasy might be written  $S \diamond a$  instead of  $\$ \diamond a$ , so too does the pervert make every effort to cancel out the lack in the Other, such that his fundamental fantasy might be written  $a \diamond A$  instead of  $a \diamond A$ .

While this writing has the benefit of stressing that the subject in perversion strives after the completion of the Other, we prefer to keep the entire schema Lacan proposes in “Kant with Sade” (1966): it also shows the subject in perversion as striving to complete himself. We see this striving as the prolongation of Freud’s notion of the pervert’s disavowal: by striving to complete himself, the pervert tries to ‘un-castrate’ himself (Swales, 2004; Fink 1996).

### *Differentiation of neurosis and perversion*

Lacan’s analyses of the neurotic and perverse phantasms show how they go about different ways to fill lack, which allows for differentiation between both structures. As we explained, the neurotic believes to fill that lack with a ‘fake’ object  $a$ . It is exactly what the

pervert does not do: he does not *play* with a *false* object *a*. For the pervert, the relation to the Other and the function of the object *a* are structured quite differently. The pervert imagines himself capable of restituting the object *a* to the Other, filling its lack – and *thus* his own lack. While for the neurotic, demand is what protects him from the desire of the Other, for the pervert, it is the restitution of the object *a*. In other words: while they *both* strive for the completion of the Other, they do it in radically different ways. For both the neurotic and the pervert, if this lack can be filled, then the Other can be completed, and once completed, won't be lacking, won't be desiring any more. Of course, this is crooked reasoning, but this is the way the subject 'tricks' himself into being able to believe the Other is not threatening — i.e. into hiding from the anxiety the desire of the Other provokes.

### The connection with the young homosexual woman

Lacan takes an interesting stance on Freud's account of the case of the young homosexual woman (1962, pp. 109-111).<sup>242</sup> He seems to try to answer the question he announced when referring to masochism, saying about the subject in masochism: "you will see what happens when he can't stay on the stage any longer" (p. 107).

While the case of the young homosexual woman is certainly not a case of masochism, it illustrates perfectly what happens when one leaves the stage: a passage à l'acte. When her beloved Lady breaks the relationship, the young homosexual woman flings herself off a low bridge. The falling on the ground is connoted by Freud with the word 'Niederkommen', literally 'coming down'.

For Lacan, this is paradigmatic for the encounter with the object *a*: "The *niederkommen* is essential to any sudden moment at which the subject is brought into relationship with what he is as *a* [...] the leap is taken at the very moment that [...] the conjunction of desire and the law is brought about" (p. 110).

Why is the homosexual young woman confronted with the conjunction of desire and law?  
Lacan offers a concise explanation:

The young woman, whose disappointment with her father because of the birth of her younger brother was the turning point in her life, had therefore set about making of her womanly castration what the knight does with his lady, namely, to offer her precisely the sacrifice of his virile prerogatives, which, through the inversion of this sacrifice, made her the support of what lacks in the field of the Other, namely, the supreme guarantee of the following, that the law is truly and verily the father's desire, that one can be sure of this, that there is a glory of the father, an absolute phallus,  $\Phi$  (p. 110).

Freud had already stressed the fact that the birth of a younger brother and ensuing disappointment with her father was at the origin of the young homosexual's particular position later in life. But Lacan interprets this disappointment. What is disappointing to young woman, in the final analysis, is the fact that her father loses his position as absolute, perfect, non-lacking Other. Her father's lack and thus the lack in the Other appears. What is at stake for the young homosexual woman, is, in other words, the appearance of the threatening lack in the Other.

In order to deal with this threatening, lacking Other, the young woman tries to fill its lack: she tries to complete the Other. In other words, she strives to complete her father in order to take away his lack. A father without lack can be pictured as a complete Other, as endowed with an absolute phallus, a symbol for the absence of lack, written as  $\Phi$ .<sup>243</sup>

How does the young homosexual woman try to fill this lack, and to position her father as endowed with an absolute phallus? By taking the lack upon herself, by using her own lack, by sacrificing her lack – her womanly castration, her object *a*. It is by sacrificing her own lack that she props up the lack in her father. It is at the very moment that her father loses this position – by openly disapproving of her relationship with the 'Lady' – that she passes to the act, that she 'niederkommt'.

We can now reread the quote above as follows: the young homosexual woman strives to make her lack – her object *a* – into that what will come to complete the lacking Other. She

sacrifices her object *a* – better: herself as object *a* – to complete the Other with it. The father as completed Other is here an Other who's desire is law; by completing her father, by obeying his law, she stops the Other's desire. In this process, a *sacrifice* of the subject is involved, because the subject makes what is most intimate to herself, her own lack, the support of what lacks in the Other; she sacrifices her own being for the supreme guarantee of the Other. When this ruse no longer functions, there is a passage to the act.

This is paradigmatic for perversion. The pervert imagines himself to be able to ensure the Other's jouissance. He turns himself into the instrument of the Other's jouissance, restoring the object *a* to the place of the barred Other. Although the pervert presents himself as completely engaged in seeking jouissance, one of his aims is to make the law present, to put a limit to jouissance. For the young homosexual, although she presents herself as seeking limitless jouissance with her Lady, one of her aims is to make her father's law present, in order to put a limit to her jouissance.

This notion is the kernel of Fink's views on perversion: "perversion involves the attempt to prop up the law so that limits can be set to jouissance" (1997, p. 165). He is largely followed in this by Swales (2004), who repeatedly stresses the pervert's goal is to prop up the paternal function.

To sacrifice one's lack for the Other's completion is exactly what the neurotic refuses: "What the neurotic does not want, and what he strenuously refuses to do right up until the end of his analysis, is to sacrifice his castration to the Other's jouissance, allowing it to serve the Other" (1966, p. 323).

The neurotic subject asks: Why me? Why would I have to sacrifice this castration, this pound of flesh, to the Other? The neurotic believes that it would be possible to attain a complete jouissance if it were not forbidden and if it were not for an Other who is demanding his castration. Instead of seeing the lack in the Other, the neurotic focuses on the Other's demand of him.



The idea of sacrifice is interesting to single out. It is reminiscent of what Lacan called in Seminar IV (1956) 'being the phallus of the mother', which demands the sacrifice of the subject — the fetishist — to plug the hole in the m(Other). It is also this logic of the sacrifice that we see returning in masochism and in sadism. As we explained in the last chapter, by becoming a black fetish, the subject in sadism offers himself loyally — sacrifices himself, by instrumentalizing himself — for the Other's jouissance. The subject in masochism, by being a dog under the table, also sacrifices himself, but with — according to Lacan, as we will see — another aim: the Other's anxiety.

In the context of 'niederkommen', of 'falling of the stage', Lacan links the stage with the rim and with the conjunction of the law and desire that we will analyze in detail in the next few paragraphs. The jump out of the window — which pictures the limit between the stage and the world, which Lacan also sees as crystalized in the stamp and in the cut — appears at the moment where the conjunction of the law and the desire accomplishes itself: the subject, in a passage to the act, returns to the position of fundamental exclusion in which she feels herself.

### The law and the pervert's defense

In the context of his equation "desire is the law" (p. 150), Lacan calls the desire of the mother the substance of the law, while he calls the law of the father that forbids incest, the law that normalizes desire. He chooses the angle of eroticism to talk about the link between desire and the law, calling its most exemplary manifestation "its Oedipal manifestation, if not its Sadean one" (p. 150). He goes on to claim that desire presents itself as a will to jouissance (p. 150). Further, Lacan clearly refers to perversion as the field in which the link between desire and jouissance is best studied:

If we know something now about the pervert, it is that what appears from the outside to be an unbounded satisfaction is actually a defense and an implementation of a law inasmuch as it curbs, suspends, and halts the subject on the path to jouissance (p. 150).

This is crucial. The pervert is not the subject that enjoys jouissance without boundaries. As neurosis, perversion is a structure that acts as a defense mechanism against jouissance — a defense against the imminence of the Thing.

So, in perversion, desire presents itself as what lays down the law, and thus as subversion of the law, as satisfaction without restraint, as will to jouissance. But, this is only so on the surface: in fact, in perversion, desire is the support of the law, of the complete Other as the source of the law, a bringing in action of a law that stops on the path of this jouissance, a defense against the Real (cf. p. 150).

This implies the notion that the pervert looks for castration — a notion Freud already hinted at in his texts on fetishism and that Lacan took up in Seminar IV (1956) — or, more in general, for something that performs the function of castration, namely something that comes to regulate his jouissance (Fink, 1996; Swales, 2004).

Of course, the pervert's will to jouissance fails. As said, the pervert is not striving for his own jouissance: "the pervert doesn't know what jouissance he is exercising in his activity. It is not, in any case, in the service of his own jouissance" (p. 150).

The reader knows of course, that it is at the service of the jouissance of the Other (Fink, 1996; Swales, 2004; Valas, 2012). This is in the prolongation of the idea that the pervert tries to bring about a complete Other, whose will is law — as pictured by the 'v' in the schema of the Sadean phantasm. The difficulty with perversion is to think this together with the idea that the pervert looks to be an unbarred S, an S not marked by the law. The solution is to see that before the 'division' (as in the schema of the division), both the S and the A are complete, and after the division, they both are incomplete. In other words: their incompleteness or completeness is mutual, their relationship is transitive; striving for completion of the one equals striving for the completion of the other.

While the pervert passes by a subversion of the law, the neurotic has to pass the institution of the law to sustain his desire. The neurotic highlights the fact that he can only

desire according to the law. That is why his desire is unsatisfied (for the hysteric) or impossible (for the obsessional).

For Lacan, the pervert is instrumental in unmasking the notion of the moral autonomy of the subject as a fiction, as a defense of the subject. The moral law, he claims, is heteronomous (p. 151). It comes from the Real, and it elides the subject. It is this heteronomy of the law that Lacan unmasked in Kant and in Sade (1966), and of which the subject in sadism is the paradigmatic example. One could turn the terms around: the discovery of the fundamental heteronomy of the subject is instrumental for Lacan to unmask what it really is about in perversion.

### The sadist's and the masochist's completion of the Other

In this chapter, equipped with the analysis of the becoming real of the object *a* and its function in perversion, we first analyze the specificity and particularity of sadism and of masochism, and conclude by stressing their asymmetry and their common factors, i.e. that, what makes them structurally perversions.

#### The schema of sadistic desire

To introduce the schema of sadistic desire, Lacan claims that it is in the locus where one tends to seek for the subject that we find the object *a*, there where one tends to say 'I', at the level of the unconscious (p. 103). The 'I' referred to here, points clearly to the subject of the enunciation. While in our analysis of "Kant with Sade" (1966), we showed that Lacan linked the subject of the enunciation to the Other, here it seems to be identical to the object *a*. This is indicative for the idea that the I is used in the same way as the cause: as that which is behind desire.

Lacan once more stresses the idea of *being* – we should add: also – the *a*: "At this level, you are *a*, the object, and everyone knows that this is what is intolerable" (p. 103). It is

this intolerable experience that he wants to illustrate with a remark about sadism and masochism, “a remark that is designed to shift, even to shake up, the ruts in which you are accustomed to leaving the functions described as sadism and masochism, as if what were involved were merely a register of a kind of immanent aggression and its reversibility” (p. 103).

In our opinion, this ‘you are *a*’ should be handled with care. It should be interpreted as the hypothetical, primordial subject of jouissance *S* that is split into  $\$$  and *a*. It is in this sense that one ‘is’  $\$$  as much as one ‘is’ *a*.

This precision should not derive the attention from the focus put on the identification with the *a*, which is one of the structural traits of perversion that Lacan elaborates here.

Lacan refers here depreciatingly to Freud’s early theory of masochism as a reversal of sadism. As we described in the chapter on Freud about sadism and masochism, Freud wrestled for decades with this theory, till he finally left it behind to recognize a primary masochism next to a primary sadism. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (Freud, 1920g), he uncoupled both from the pleasure principle and linked them to a drive of their own, the death drive. One could see the object *a* as Lacan’s crystallization of Freud’s death drive: that what causes the heteronomy of the subject, that what drives the subject towards lethal jouissance. This is the clearest in Seminar VII (1959), where the death drive figures as the Thing.

Lacan promises to point out the differences in the subjective structure of sadism and masochism, and introduces what he calls ‘the schema of sadistic desire’ for this purpose. In Staferla, an online edition of Lacan’s Seminars, one finds (Lacan, 1962, Staferla edition, p. 164) a more complete version than in Miller’s edition (Lacan, 1962). The main difference with the version Miller presents (Lacan, 1962, p. 104) are the following: an ‘*S*’ is written above the left side of the schema, an ‘*A*’ above the right side, the  $\$$  is indexed with a ‘*o*’ (small zero) and the ‘*d*’ with an ‘*S*’:

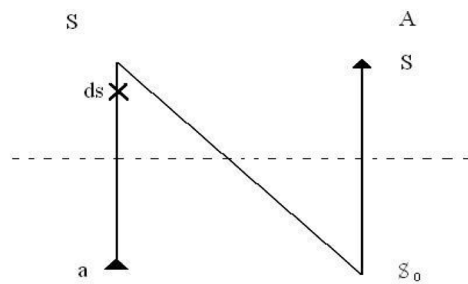


Illustration 6: The schema of sadistic desire from the Staferla edition (p. 164)

How to read this schema?

It resembles, but is also quite different from the schema of the Sadean phantasm in “Kant with Sade” (1966). There, the schema is oriented as follows:  $d \rightarrow a \rightarrow V \rightarrow \$ \rightarrow S$ , while here, we have the orientation:  $a \rightarrow d \rightarrow \$_0 \rightarrow S$ . To summarize,  $d$  and  $a$  have changed place and the ‘ $V$ ’ is not figuring in the schema. There is also the ‘ $_0$ ’ that appears to index the ‘ $\$$ ’. Above the schema, the ‘ $S$ ’ and the ‘ $A$ ’ indicate the side of the subject and the side of the Other. The ‘ $ds$ ’ probably stands for ‘*désir sadique*’, sadistic desire.

Let us compare the schema briefly with some other schemas we discussed earlier. We remark that, as with the schema of the Sadean phantasm from “Kant with Sade” (1966), with the optical schema and with the schemas of the desire of the pervert and the neurotic, Lacan divides the schema of sadistic desire in two parts: the left part is the side of the  $S$ , the as yet unconstituted subject, and the right part is the side of the unbarred Other (1962, p. 103).

As already discussed in our commentary on “Kant with Sade” (1966), it is difficult to see why the  $S$  is to the right, at the side of the Other, and not at the side of the subject.<sup>244</sup> On the other hand, one of the difficulties we signaled there, seems to be resolved here. Where in the schema of the Sadean phantasm, the order of the sequence  $d \rightarrow a \rightarrow V$  didn’t do justice to the notion that the object  $a$  is *cause* of desire, here we find the  $a$  preceding the  $d$ . Lacan clearly adapted the schema to reflect his theoretical advances.

In his commentary on the schema, Lacan claims that one finds in this schema the distinctions that the graph of desire from Seminar V (1957) organized, but in a condensed form, as a graph with four tops (1962, p. 104). It is true that we find the symbols  $a$ ,  $d$ ,  $\$$  and  $A$  back in the graph of Seminar V (1957), albeit not as vertices of the graph, but as parts of some mathemes that function as vertices — save for  $\$$  and  $d$ , which appear as proper vertices in their own right. Other similarities between the two schemas are neither obvious nor indicated by Lacan.

What does Lacan have to say about sadistic desire? What is the famous remark that is designed to shake up our take on sadism and masochism?

The sadist's desire, with everything it entails by way of enigma, can only be formulated on the basis of the split, the dissociation, that he aims to introduce in the subject, the other party, by imposing upon him, up to a certain limit, what he is unable to tolerate — up to the precise limit at which a division appears in this subject, a gap, between his existence as a subject and what he is undergoing, what he may be suffering from, in his body (p. 105).

We analyze this quote along with the symbols used in the schema. It is about a sadistic desire, written here as 'ds'. It is also about a division, a gap, a dissociation that is connoted by the bar in the  $\$$  and that refers back to the schema of division. So, sadistic desire tries to split the other party, addressed here as subject.

But what or who is split here? It is, of course, a subject that is split. But which subject? It can, logically, only be about the mythical complete, unsplit subject, the brute subject of jouissance,  $S$ . The notion of the splitting of the  $S$  resulting into  $\$$  and leaving  $a$  as a remainder, is coherent with the first schema of division and with our Eulerian schema.

The result of this split, this division, is here specified as the other party's 'existence as a subject' — in other words, the  $\$$  — and 'what he is undergoing, what he may be suffering from, in his body' — in other words, the  $a$ . Remark that while the  $\$$  is linked to the notion of 'existence of the subject', i.e. a symbolic notion, the  $a$  is here linked to the body, to

what Lacan described in the first part of the Seminar as the 'libidinal reserve', to something that we read as real.

The subject as other stands here also for the Other, because, in our opinion, for the pervert, the other that is singled out as partner and/or victim, always stands for the Other. In that sense, the splitting that the pervert's desire aims at, is a splitting of the Other, a discompleting of the A into  $\bar{A}$ .

In our opinion, the dialectics between the subject in sadism, the complete Other and the barred Other, should be taken one step further. While the subject in sadism discompletes the Other, he at the same time, confronted with the discompleted Other, as shown in our analysis of the Sadean phantasm, takes the place of the object *a* in order to accomplish what? The re-completion of the dis-completed Other. Swales (2004) clearly describes this discompleting/recompleting move when she writes: "The pervert brings out and then plugs up the lack in the Other" (p. 92).

Stated differently: the subject of sadism strives to suture the lack, to fill the hole in the victim as incomplete Other. How? By offering himself to it, in the guise of the object *a* – as voice, as herald of the law, as we saw in the precedent chapter – that will complete the lacking victim/Other — just as is the case for the subject in fetishism, taking the place of the (m)Other's missing phallus, as we showed above, and for the subject in masochism, by making the object *a* as voice emerge in the locus of the Other, as we will show later. In this paradoxical quest, the subject in sadism is, of course, doomed to fail.

How does the subject of sadism strive to accomplish his quest? On the surface, it seems that the subject of sadism tries to cause the Other's splitting by making its body – the victim's, that is – suffer to the limit.<sup>245</sup>

But, Lacan explains — and it is his main point here — that it is not this suffering that is sought by the subject in sadism: "It is not so much the other party's suffering that is being sought in the sadistic intention as his anxiety" (1962, p. 104).

The notion of the subject in sadism looking for the Other's anxiety seems to concord with the notion of the object *a* as the object that anxiety is not without: it is by turning himself into an object *a* that the subject in sadism intends to provoke the anxiety of the Other.

It is this anxiety that Lacan wants to connote with the little zero (<sub>0</sub>), which explains why it is written next to the \$ in the right part of the schema: "It is not so much the other party's suffering that is being sought in the sadistic intention as his anxiety. I noted this with the little sign, \$<sub>0</sub>" (p. 104).

Lacan continues his analysis by recalling (p. 104) that he drew the parallel between Kant and sadistic desire in Seminar VII (1959) and in "Kant with Sade" (1966). Apart from this recall, Lacan wants to add a new trait to his depiction of the subject in sadism: the fact that the subject in sadism 'doesn't know': "In carrying through his act, his rite, [...] what the agent of sadistic desire doesn't know is what he is seeking, and what he is seeking is to make himself appear [...] as a pure object, as a black fetish" (1962, p. 104). This quote corroborates our reading of the subject in sadism taking the place of the object *a*, which concords as well with our analysis of "Kant with Sade" (1966). He also uses there the same, unexplained, notion of the black fetish. I take it to be merely a poetic impression of the object *a*.<sup>246</sup>

In passing by, Lacan also mentions about sadistic desire that "he who is its agent moves towards a realisation" (1962, p. 104). We already drew the reader's attention to this notion of realization in the context of the schema of the Sadean phantasm. It is consistent with the idea of the schema of the Sadean phantasm as a trajectory ending in S, with the subject of jouissance as the aim of the subject in sadism.

The subject in sadism, as split subject, not only strives to realize himself as an unsplit, mythical subject, untainted by any lack, but also that in the process, he strives to turn  $\mathcal{A}$  into A, to realize, to complete the Other, with whom, in a certain way, he identifies.



In the schema in “Kant with Sade” (1966), it was clear that the subject in sadism was in the position of the object *a*. There, the difficulty was how to think desire as ‘causing’, as being prior to the object *a* – remember the arrow from *d* to *a*. In the schema of sadistic desire in Seminar X (1962), as said, the ‘*d*’ (here as ‘*ds*’) and the ‘*a*’ have changed places. This resolves the difficulty – it is the object *a* that causes desire, but it leaves open another one: how can the subject in sadism himself, as the pure object, the object *a*, the black fetish that he wants to turn himself into, be at the same time at the origin, the initium of this schema?

It is the object *a* as voice, as source of the enigmatic law, intimately linked with the superego, that Lacan designates as the object-cause of the desire of the subject in sadism, as we will see in one of the following paragraphs. We take the idea that the subject in sadism aims to turn himself into a ‘black fetish’ as another aspect of the dynamics between the subject and the Other in sadism. In that sense, both the schemas are correct, but incomplete, because they each depict only partially the complex dynamics of sadism.

In the end, it is about one and the same object *a*. In its appearance as voice, at the initium of the schema, it stresses the lack that causes the desire of the subject in sadism, while in its appearance as black fetish, at the end of the schema, it stresses the incompleteness of the Other (while at the same time it tries to complete the Other). As argued earlier, we see the incompleteness of the subject and of the Other are transitive.

### The subject in sadism and anxiety

In Lacan’s analysis of the relation of the subject in sadism with its Other, anxiety plays a key role:

In the sadist, anxiety is less concealed [than in masochism, as we will see]. It is even so barely concealed as to come right to the fore in the fantasy, which makes the victim’s anxiety a required condition (p. 165).

But on closer inspection, what seems to be sought consciously – the Other's anxiety – concerns only the surface, covering over what it's really about. Contrary to the received idea, the subject in sadism does not try to negate the existence of his victim, his Other:

What does the sadist seek out in the Other? It is very clear that for him that the Other exists, and just because he takes him for an object, this doesn't mean we should say that we have some kind of immature or even pre-genital relationship here (p. 165).

This is clearly an attack on the whole of the psychoanalytical tradition that sees perversion as a pregenital accident of a subject on its way to a 'harmonic', mature relation with its object. To stress this point, Lacan reminds his audience that he already showed that the Other is absolutely essential for the subject in sadism, notably in his Seminar on ethics (1959), by bringing together Kant and Sade (1962, p. 165).

Fink and Swales do not deny that the Other is essential for the pervert, but, following their basic claim that the paternal function is deficient for the pervert, they put forward that the Other does not exist for the pervert: "in perversion the subject struggles to bring the law into being – in a word, to make the Other exist" (Fink, 1996, p. 165); "the pervert does not seek to negate the existence of the Other [...] In perversion, the Other must be made to exist" (Swales, 2004, p. 91). We agree that calling forward a law giving instance that comes to limit the pervert's jouissance is a key to understand its subjective structure. But concluding from there that the Other does not exist but needs to be 'created' by the pervert, is, in our opinion, a bridge too far.

Lacan's answer as to the question of what it is that the subject in sadism ultimately seeks to cause in the Other, is not the expected 'jouissance', but an intriguing passage from Sade we already cited in the part on "Kant with Sade" (1966). As pointed out there, Lacan's references are wrong when he says: "I leave it to you to look up in *Juliette*, even in *The 120 days*..., the few passages in which the protagonists, entirely absorbed as they are in satisfying their avidity for torments on their chosen victims, enter the strange, peculiar and curious trance that is expressed in these odd words [...]" (1962, p. 165). The

'odd words' appear only in "Juliette". They are the following: "my dear Lubin, I triumph. Cunt-skin!" (Sade, 1797, p. 195).

We remind the reader that we interpreted this sentence as an example of the phantasm of the subject in sadism to acquire the object *a* – ultimately to restore it to the field of the Other – and as confirming Freud's notion of the pervert – paradigmatically represented by the subject in fetishism – as disavowing (female) castration. To put it differently: against all odds, the subject in sadism finds anyway something he can hold for women's missing phallus: cunt-skin.

Lacan comments this enigmatic passage:

[...] it is in some respect the subject's nether side that is being sought out, which takes on its signification from the characteristic of the glove turned inside out underlined by the victim's womanly essence. That which is most concealed passes over to the outside. Observe that the text itself indicates in some way that this moment is totally unfathomed by the subject and leaves the characteristic of his own anxiety masked to him (p. 165).

The uncanny image of the subject in sadism extracting something from the concealed locus where the woman is 'missing' the phallus, is central. While in Lacan's analysis of fetishism, this 'something' was interpreted on a phallic mode, here it is generalized to the object *a*. What is extracted here, that was concealed and now passes over to the outside, is what the Other lacks. And, as we see it, extraction of the lack of the Other equals completion of the Other, restitution of the object *a* to the  $\bar{A}$  in order to turn it into an *A*. To put it in a formula, consistent with our Eulerian schema:

$$\bar{A} + a = A$$

In our opinion, it is not crucial to know if it is the anxiety or the jouissance of the Other that is aimed at in this process: it is the Other's completion that is central. Moreover, in our opinion, as noted earlier, anxiety is but one possible manifestation of jouissance. The fact that the term 'jouissance' has disappeared in Lacan's answer to the question as to what the subject in sadism ultimately aims for, and is replaced by 'anxiety', strengthens this thesis.

Lacan uses the opportunity to draw attention to another trait of the subject in sadism: the notion that he is laboring, working: “the instrumental character to which the function of the agent is reduced. What robs him, except in a fleeting moment, of the aim of his action is the belaboured character of his operation” (p. 165).

In this quote, Lacan repeats the idea, already elaborated in “Kant with Sade” (1966), that the subject in sadism turns himself into an instrument. He links this to the notion of the subject in sadism ‘working’ for his aim — the completion of the Other — and missing it, except in a fleeting moment. This is the moment of the passage à l’acte, in which there is jouissance, but, as we showed in the part on the Seminar on ethics (1959), the subject fades in that moment; he falls from the scene.

To illustrate the position of the subject in sadism, Lacan compares its Other to God. He repeats an idea we already underlined in our analysis of “Kant with Sade” (1966):

[The sadist] has a relationship with God. This is splashed out here, there and everywhere in Sade’s text. Sade cannot take a single step forward in supremely Evil-Being without it turning out — and it’s just as plain for him as for the one who speaks — that God is the one involved. He gives himself a dickens of a time, a considerable and exhausting devil of a time to the point of missing his goal, trying to realise, — which, thank the lord and make no mistake about it, Sade spares us having to reconstruct because he spells it out as such, namely — to realise God’s jouissance (p. 165).

It is easy to see that God stands here for the Other. It is, could one say, the prototype of the Other. This shows once more that in sadism, the relation to the Other is omnipresent and central, and that the subject in sadism turns himself into an instrument, laboring for the Other’s jouissance. Or, to be more precise: for its completion.

### The object voice

In the context of the fourth part of the Seminar, ‘The five forms of the object *a*’, Lacan completes and comments the catalog of objects *a*. He introduces the voice as object *a* by

a digression on a Jewish ritual instrument — the Shofar — which is sounded at certain ritualistic events (Robertson, 2015; Leader, 2003). For Lacan, the interest in this object lies “in how it presents the voice to us in an exemplary form where it stands, in a certain sense potentially, in a separated form” (p. 250).

He bases himself on an article of Theodor Reik (1928) to interpret the Shofar as the separated, disembodied voice of God — and thus as the voice of the Other. It helps him to raise the question of what happens when the signifier is not only articulated, but is uttered and voiced. While linguistics focuses purely on a system of oppositions, Lacan draws attention to that, what linguistics is blind for: “This system is supported by any matter that is capable of organizing itself into oppositions that are distinctive for one and all. When something from this system passes into an utterance, a new dimension is involved, an isolated dimension, a dimension unto itself, the specifically vocal dimension” (p. 249). For Lacan, this vocal dimension, the voice, stripped of signifiers, constitutes a form of the object *a*, the object *a* as voice.

Lacan articulates the voice with the absence of a guarantee in the Other, and calls the voice “the otherness of what is said” (p. 275). He stresses that the voice at issue is the voice as an imperative, as demanding obedience (cf. p. 276).

This notion of imperative links the voice as object *a* with Kant. Lacan describes the voice as object *a* as that: “which has so far appeared enigmatically in the shape of a certain imperative said to be categorical in which we meet the character of fundamental certainty already marked out by traditional philosophy and spelt out by Kant in the form of moral conscience” (p. 230).

As we saw in our part on “Kant with Sade” (1966), this enigmatic command, this moral conscience, is another way of naming the superego.<sup>247</sup> In that sense, the superego *is* an object *a*: “there cannot be any valid analytic conception of the superego that loses sight of the fact that, in its deepest phase, it is one of the forms of the object *a*” (p. 295).

The disembodied voice is what Lacan pointed out in “Kant with Sade” (1966), separating the subject of the enunciation and the enunciating subject. It is the enunciating subject, as Other, as enigmatic command that can be seen as a disembodied voice. As Swales puts it: “Moral conscience and the introjected Law are contents that are taken up by the function of the superego. The superego as ‘a voice first and foremost’ is the process of making an imperative: “You must...!” (2004, p. 119).

It is this notion of enigmatic imperative, of contentless law, that links the voice as object *a* to sadism. In sadism, the subject poses himself as the instrument of this voice, as the executioner of the source, the herald of the law.<sup>248</sup>

### The masochist as object

Lacan contrasts the position of the subject in sadism starkly with the position of the subject in masochism. He stresses that it is the declared goal of the subject in masochism to provoke the Other’s anxiety:

This could not be more different from the masochist’s position for whom this embodiment of himself as object is the declared goal — whether he becomes a dog under the table or a piece of merchandise, an item dealt with by contract, sold amongst other objects put on the market. In sum, what he seeks is his identification with the common object, the object of exchange. It remains impossible for him to grasp himself for what he is, inasmuch as, like all of us, he is an *a* (p. 105).

To be short, the subject in masochism wants to put himself in the position of the *common object*, while in fact he is trying to grasp himself as *object a*. The pain that being in this position brings, is deemed by Lacan to be only secondary: “Pain is not the essential element in masochism” (cf. p. 176). Swales (2004, p. 178) and Fink (1996, p. 187) even claim that the subject in masochism takes pleasure in his own pain only insofar as his suffering proves that an Other is imposing limits upon him.

The difference between the common object and the object *a* is here once more stressed. The common object is an object that finds its place in the symbolic order, that is characterized by its place, an object that can be exchanged and traded. The object *a*, on the other hand, is what escapes symbolization and imaginization: it belongs to the Real. In that sense, Lacan seems to say that the declared goal of the subject in masochism is to stage himself as a common object, while his undeclared goal is to see himself as real. Of course, this is doomed to fail, because it is impossible to grasp oneself as real.

But, to say the least, the common object that the subject in masochism strives to identify with, seems to be a very special and specific common object. The description Lacan gives of this common object, refers to *waste*, to *garbage*, to *a remainder*. In brief: the subject in masochism seems to identify with that aspect of the common object that no one would want to trade anymore. In Marxist terms, it is an object that has lost all use-value, all exchange-value and hence all economic value; accordingly, it has no price, it is price-less; it falls out of the exchange-system (Marx, 1887), out of the symbolic order. What Lacan describes here as a common object, is the object *a* par excellence. In other words, it is by identifying himself with the extreme form of the common object, with the limit-case of the common object, that the subject in masochism aims to grasp himself as object *a*.

It seems that the subject in masochism tries to convince himself — and, in the process, the Other — that the object *a* is a common object. Or, more precise: the subject in masochism tries to make the object *a* that he (also) is, enter into the Symbolic. Yet in other terms, the subject in masochism tries to disavow his real aspect, his lack — and *thus* the Other's lack — by staging it on the symbolic level. Or, by staging the symbolic order as if there were no lack in it.

The fact that for the subject in masochism, this identification with the object *a* always only happens on a scene, is important. The notion of scene, of staging oneself is linked to the notion of acting out. And this goes for the subject in sadism as well (1962, p. 105).

The scene or the stage can be seen as equivalent with the side of the Other: it is what is played out in images and signifiers. That is why disappearing from the stage is seen as encountering the Real. Miller is instructive in this context: “[The scene] is an imaginary scene, but one that is also the scene of the Other, because in relation to the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic are on the same side” (Miller, 2003, Lesson 20).<sup>249</sup>

Connecting this idea with the rearticulated optical schema allows us to show that to the left of the optical schema, one finds the object *a* as real, while at the right side of the schema, one finds the mirror, consisting of the Imaginary (as image) and the Symbolic (as Other). This makes sense in the context of the object *a* being non-imaginarizable and non-symbolizable.

In this sense, *passage-à-l’acte* is what happens when the subject leaves the stage to rejoin the object *a* (in the Real), while acting-out happens when the subject makes the object *a* appear in the field of the Other — with the reservation that this never really can happen: when an object *a* appears in the field of the Other, it is always an object *a* ‘postiche’, always a common, exchangeable object.

Lacan adds another, more useable formula: “Whenever there is masochism, it is because the super-ego is quite mean” (p. 105).

In this quote, one of the crucial traits of masochism is pointed out: the link with the superego. The superego is the carrier of the voice as object *a*: the carrier of the enigmatic command that Kant ascribed to the voice of conscience, the herald of the Sadean maxim.

The superego, as we see it, figures the fact that speech precedes the subject, always contains an enigmatic command, a law that figures our lack, our structural incompleteness; a voice that figures the object *a*, a — heteronomous — law that turns us as such into its object — into its object *a*, into the object *a* of the Other.



Lacan, elaborating the role of the superego in masochism, takes up Freud's tripartition of masochism in erogenous, feminine and moral masochism. Lacan comments that this tripartition is so disparate that it does not bring us anything. To understand masochism, Lacan says, we need to find the unity underlying these forms. He claims to find this unity in the formula: "the superego is part of the functioning of this object as its cause" (p. 105). Thus, Lacan sees the superego as the *cause* of masochism, with cause in its special meaning.

Lacan articulates the idea of the identity of desire and the law with masochism:

The Oedipus myth means nothing but the following — at the origin, desire, as the father's desire, and the law are one and the same thing. The relationship between the law and desire is so tight that only the function of the law traces out the path of desire. Desire, as desire for the mother, is identical to the function of the law. It is inasmuch as she is forbidden by the law that the law imposes this desire for the mother. Concerning her [...] a commandment is introduced into the very structure of desire [...] To spell it right out, one desires with a commandment. The Oedipus myth means the father's desire is what has laid down the law (p. 106).

This is a crucial passage in the Seminar. Lacan links here the Oedipus — which is intrinsically connected with the phallus — with the *general* structure of desire, which is connected with the object *a* in general.

Lacan makes the link between the Oedipus and masochism by articulating the idea of law and desire: "When desire and the law find themselves together again, what the masochist means to show [...] is that the desire of the Other lays down the law" (p. 106).

This passage is not directly understandable in the light of what Lacan said before, concerning masochism. Here, the subject in masochism strives to make an Other appear whose desire lays down the law. As Fink puts it with precision: "moral law is thus inextricably associated with expressions of the Other's desire and jouissance, and the masochist seeks to elicit that jouissance in lieu of the law [...] The Other's desire or will is accepted by the masochist instead of the law, in place of the law, in absence of the law" (1997, p. 189).

But how could one link this together with the idea that the subject in masochism would try to complete the Other? In the context of Lacan's analysis of the case of the young homosexual, the one who lays down the law was exemplified by Freud's original father of the primitive horde, who was an uncastrated father, a father who had all the jouissance, who's desire was law. As such, he stands for the complete Other. In other words, the subject in masochism tries to make the complete Other appear, by making the object *a* voice/superego appear at its locus.

We find here the same apparent contradiction as in sadism: the object *a* seems to be in two places: as the subject in masochism himself, in his position of dejectum, and as the voice of the Other he tries to make appear. As in sadism, both 'positions' of the object *a* are, in our opinion, not clearly articulated in Lacan, but they show compatible aspects of masochism. The object *a* as dejectum stresses the lack in the subject in masochism, while the object *a* as voice stresses the lack in the Other.

Lacan continues:

The masochist himself appears in the function that I would call the function of the dejectum. It's our object *a*, but in the appearance of a cast-off, thrown to the dogs, in the rubbish, in the bin, on the scrapheap of common objects, for want of being able to put it anywhere else (1962, pp. 106-107).

Here, Lacan states clearly that the common object and the object *a* he differentiated it from, are one and the same, or, to be more precise, he sees the common object in its form of waste, of rubbish, as an appearance of the object *a*. It is "one of the aspects that the *a* can take on such as it is illustrated in perversion" (p. 107).

It is in this context that Lacan mints another confusing formula: "To recognize oneself as object of desire is always masochistic" (p. 107).

Lacan specifies that for the subject in masochism, this recognition happens on the scene. This seems to presuppose that for the neurotic, there can be such a masochistic

recognition, which does however not turn the neurotic into a pervert. As such it does not seem to be a structural trait that can differentiate masochism from other perversions or from neurosis.

Lacan expands his comments on the notion of the stage: "We aren't always on the stage, even though the stage stretches out far and wide, right up to the domain of our dreams. When we are not on the stage, when we stay just shy of it, and when we strive to read in the Other what it revolves around, we only find there, at x, lack" (p. 107). In other words: we strive to stay on the stage, for off-stage, we are confronted with the lack of the Other.

The stage as circumscribed by a rim, an edge, a gap (p. 107). Lacan sees it illustrated by the mirror in the schema, but also by the lozenge (<>). It is this gap that Lacan calls the locus of anxiety. Using Miller's topological remark of the left side of the optical schema as the locus of the Real and the right side as the locus of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, one could see this gap as the limit between the Real on one side, the Imaginary and the Symbolic on the other.

### The Other's anxiety or the Other's jouissance?

Lacan – just like Freud did – singles out the subject in masochism as the most enigmatic of the perverse structures:

He is the most enigmatic one that can be singled out in the field of perversion. You'll tell me that he knows very well that the Other is the one who enjoys. This would therefore be the pervert stepping into the light of his truth. He would be the exception to everything I said earlier, that is, that the pervert doesn't know who's enjoying. Of course, it's always the Other and the *maso* ostensibly knows this. Well, what escapes the notice of the masochist and puts him in the same position as the rest of the perverts, is that he believes, of course, that what he is seeking is the Other's jouissance, but precisely because he believes this, this is not what he is seeking. What escapes his notice, even though this is a tangible truth, lying around all over the place in everybody's reach, is the fact that he is seeking the Other's anxiety (1962, p. 152).

Lacan seems to claim that, while all the other perverts look for the Other's jouissance, the subject in masochism looks ultimately for the Other's anxiety. But how to interpret what it means to look for the anxiety of the Other, what it means to look for the Other's jouissance, and, most importantly, what the difference is? How to find behind this difference what is common for all perverts in their relation to the Other?

In order to elucidate this, Lacan develops his theory on anxiety further. He interprets Freud's notion of anxiety as a signal in the ego of an imminent internal danger. Lacan argues that there is no internal danger for two reasons. Primo, the neurological apparatus is a single surface and as such has no interior. Secondo, the  $\Psi$ -system, that according to Freud was responsible for memory and endogenous stimuli, is for Lacan located in another dimension, the dimension of the Other as locus of the signifier. This allows Lacan to define anxiety as the specific manifestation of the desire of the Other (p. 152).

He sees anxiety as the signal of a demand that is not linked to any need, in other words: pure desire. As desire, it is the desire of the Other, the lack of the Other, and this lack concerns "my very Being [...] which it puts into question" (p. 152). The Other puts me in question, interrogates me at the very root of my desire as *a*, as cause of this desire (cf. p. 153).

While this new development on anxiety doesn't clarify what the anxiety of the Other might be, the notion of the subject confronted with the lack of the Other is clearly significant for the masochistic position. Lacan will try to elaborate this further by articulating anxiety with jouissance and desire.

Speaking about two paintings of Zurbaran in which Santa Lucia and Santa Agathe show respectively their cut-off eyes and breasts on a platter, Lacan delves deeper into the positions of the subject in masochism and in sadism. It is, from our point of view, one of the most important passages of the Seminar (pp. 163-165).

When the neurotic is confronted with Zurbaran's paintings, anxiety doesn't occur: "For that to occur, the subject would have to be concerned more personally, he would have to be a sadist or a masochist, for example" (p. 163).

Anxiety should occur in the subject in sadism or masochism, in other words, when they are confronted with the Other's incompleteness — which figures their own incompleteness. It is because they structurally are not equipped to answer to the Other's question with an object *a* postiche that they feel anxiety — they feel addressed as object *a*. With this cryptic remark, Lacan introduces yet another attempt at the analysis of the structures of the subjects of sadism and masochism, and the role anxiety plays in both.

Lacan states that the phantasm of the subject in masochism, is "being the object of a jouissance of the Other" (p. 163). He stipulates — enigmatically — that this will to jouissance is the jouissance of the subject in masochism, for the subject in masochism doesn't necessarily meet his partner. In our opinion, as the partner of the subject in masochism is always, ultimately, the Other, Lacan shows here that the will to jouissance of the subject in masochism is transitive with the will to jouissance of the Other.

This phantasm of being the object *a* for the Other is covering up what is really at stake for the subject in masochism when he posits himself "in the function of a human wreck, the poor bodily scrap that is laid out for us on these canvasses" (p. 163) — Lacan refers here to the eyes and breasts on the platters in Zurbaran's paintings.

What it really is about, is this: "the response in the Other to the subject's essential downfall into his final misery" (p. 163). And this response is anxiety.

In the masochist scenario, it is, on the surface, only about the subject in masochism and another subject, in other words a dual relationship. But this duality is only apparent, Lacan claims. A third term is always present, in the form of the Other. Lacan uses the term 'God' to characterize this third instance: "this anxiety, which is the masochist's blind aim because his phantasm masks it from him, is scarcely less, in real terms, what we

might call God's anxiety" (p. 163). This strengthens the claim that the partner of the subject in masochism is, just like the subject in sadism, always the Other.

Lacan reads what he calls 'the most Christian myth', i.e. the myth of the sacrifice of Christ, as follows: he sees Christ as a prototypical subject in masochism in his relationship with God, the absolute Other. He calls him "the man who pushed things right up to their utmost term of an anxiety that truly comes full circle only at the level of He for whom the sacrifice has been established, that is, the Father' (p 163).

Lacan, inspired, develops the image in a grandiose fashion, staging Christ, God and the soul as the subject in masochism, the Other and the object *a* respectively:

God is soulless [...] The radical change of perspective of the relation to God began with a drama, a passion, in which someone made himself the God's soul. The place of the soul is to be situated at the level of the residue, *a*, the fallen object. There is no living conception of the soul, [...] unless it is accompanied precisely in the most essential fashion by this image of the fall (p. 164).

In the terms of the simile, Christ sacrifices himself by turning himself into a soul, in order to supplement God's lack. Translated in Lacan's concepts, this results in the following formula: the subject in masochism sacrifices himself by turning himself into the object *a*, in order to supplement the lack of the Other.

Later in the Seminar, Lacan speaks about the link of the 'Christian solution' with the 'irreducible relation to the object of the cut': "It is none other than the mirage that is attached to the masochistic outcome, inasmuch as the Christian has learnt, through the dialectics of Redemption, to identify ideally with he who made himself identical with this same object, the waste object left behind out of divine retribution" (p. 220).

In this simile as well, we find the same relationships between the subject in masochism, the Other and the object *a*.

What strikes us most in these formulae, is the fact that anxiety has disappeared from it. God's soul figures in the simile, but not God's anxiety. It is replaced by divine retribution.

The anxiety of the Other is, to say the least, a peculiar notion. Stretching it to God's anxiety probably would show the frailty of the notion. We find almost no historical sources on the idea of an anxious God, save from the verse in Genesis where God says: "Behold, Adam has become like one of us in gaining knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 3:22). But the idea that God banned Adam from the garden of Eden because he was afraid Adam would become his equal, albeit both Nietzsche and Saint Augustine refer to it, does hardly tell us more about masochism.

Once one leaves this problematic notion of God's or the Other's anxiety out of the picture, the result is a generic formula that can not only figure masochism structurally, but also sadism, and perversion in general: the pervert sacrifices himself by turning himself into the object *a*, in order to supplement the lack of the Other. Of course, the subject of masochism and the subject of sadism go about their business in different ways. But the kernel of their maneuver is the same.

It is, in other words, as if the whole dialectics and differentiation of the Other's anxiety and the Other's jouissance, being the declared or masked goals of masochism or perversion, is only there to sharpen our understanding of the object *a*. In our opinion, as stated earlier, anxiety is in itself a form of jouissance (Swales 2004). Once a clearer conception of the object *a* is attained, the notions of the Other's anxiety and the Other's jouissance are impossible to differentiate, and attempts at differentiation seem only to stand in the way of a better understanding of perversion in general. We retain thus the notion that the subject in perversion strives to bring jouissance to the Other.

### Asymmetry between sadism and masochism

Let us focus now on the relationship between sadism and masochism. The fact that both strive for the completion of the Other doesn't imply that they do so by the same process.

The relationship between the subjects in sadism and masochism is irreversible and asymmetric.

Lacan accentuates this by comparing the difference between the sadist and masochist position: “One passes from one to the other by rotating it 90 degrees” (p. 177). He refers here between the lines to the schema of the Sadean phantasm (1966, p. 653) and its quarter-turn twist (1966 p. 657) in “Kant with Sade”:

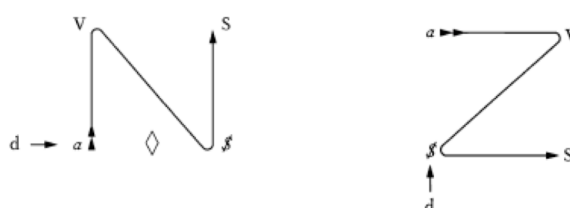


Illustration 7: Schema of the Sadean phantasm (left) and of its 90-degree rotation (right)

Sadism is not masochism back to front. This is not a reversible couple. The structure is more complex [...] one passes from one to the other by rotating it 90 degrees, and not any symmetry or inversion (1962, p. 177).

We already commented on the obscurity of Lacan’s commentary on this ‘quarter turn’ that Lacan proposed his readers to develop further as an assignment in “Kant with Sade” (1966). Our position, as said, is that any development would be pure speculation, and hence out of the scope of our dissertation. Two authors who comment on this 90-degree turn however, are worth mentioning.

Fink, in his article “An introduction to Kant with Sade” (2014), devotes quite some space to this ‘90-degree turn’ (pp. 122-127). His interpretation is interesting, but his arguments are, to our taste, far too speculative and not entirely supported by Lacan’s teaching, certainly when he claims that the subject in masochism arrives “to come in the Other, to achieve jouissance as S” (p. 124) or when a assigns fragments of “Kant with Sade” (1966) to the vertices in the turned schema. We agree however with the kernel of his is



interpretation. He interprets the subject in masochism as trying to make his partner, taken as Other, lay down the law, exemplified by the enunciation of the Sadean maxim, inverting it into “you have every right to use me”. But Fink seems to see this Other as incomplete, as not ‘free’: The Other is ‘bound’ by the maxim in the sense that from the “you have every right...” follows “...so you must”. In other words, for Fink, the subject in masochism does not try to complete the Other, but to bring about its incompleteness: “Thus the apparently free agent —the partner as Other—is little more than a puppet in the masochist’s scenario”. Fink has to forego the answer to the question as to how the subject in masochism deals with lack – his own and the Other’s – how he strives to ‘fill’ this lack. The notion that the subject in masochism strives to complete the Other’s lack with its own – i.e. by the restitution of the object *a*, seems to be absent from Fink’s horizon.

Nobus handles the 90-degree turn in quite another way. In his well-documented essay “Lacan’s “Kant with Sade”” (unpublished), he resumes the 90-degree turn as: “an operation which leaves the original sequence of the terms,  $a \rightarrow V \rightarrow \$ \rightarrow S$  unchanged, but which re-distributes *a* and  $\$$  to the ‘side of the subject’ and *V* and *S* to the ‘side of the Other’” (p. 96). This is indeed about all that we can reasonably infer from the schema. But Nobus is not interested in the schema as picturing masochism. He comments the schema exclusively as “designed to represent Sade’s personal ideology, his morals and his life philosophy, in short his own ‘practical reason’ rather than that of his libertine protagonists” (p. 96). Unfortunately, what he writes about the 90-degree turn throws no further light on Lacan’s general views on masochism.

In our opinion, the quote above has at least the benefit of confirming without any ambivalence that the second schema of Sadean desire – the one with the quarter turn –, is to be read as the schema of masochism — and the first one as the schema of sadism, as we expanded upon in the precedent chapter. If one passes from sadism to masochism by rotating it 90 degrees, it is difficult not to interpret the second schema as the schema of masochism.

Elsewhere, alternatively to calling it a 90-degrees rotation, Lacan points to what he calls an alternation between sadism and masochism: “That which, at the second level, is veiled and concealed in each of these two subjects appears in the other party at the level of what is targeted” (p. 177).

This is what Lacan repeats over and over during the course of the Seminar: the idea that the subject in sadism aims at first sight at the anxiety of the Other, but ultimately at his jouissance, while the subject in masochism aims at first sight at his jouissance, but ultimately at his anxiety (pp. 176-177).

But this is not how Lacan continues the quote above. He does it thus: “There is an occultation of anxiety in the first case, of the object *a* in the other” (p. 177; p. 165).

It is striking that Lacan replaces here the conceptual couple anxiety-jouissance with the couple anxiety-object *a*. Doing so, he indirectly equalizes the object *a* with jouissance. It leads him to discuss what is *common* to sadism and masochism: “In these structures, the radical link between anxiety and the object as falling is denounced. Its essential function is to be the remainder of the subject, the remainder as real”.<sup>250</sup>

This leads Lacan to articulate desire with anxiety and jouissance: “Anxiety is thus an intermediary term between jouissance and desire in so far as desire is constituted and founded upon the anxiety phase, once anxiety has been got through” (p. 175).

Follows that losing jouissance is losing the object *a*, which creates the lack that allows the subject to desire. This ‘losing of the *a*’ is expressed as follows: “the object falls away from the subject in his relation to desire” (p. 175).

The link between the completion of the Other and anxiety is found in the idea that anxiety is ‘the median term between jouissance and desire’. We rearticulate this with our Eulerian schema: when the mythical subject of jouissance (*S*) is divided by the complete Other (*A*), by the signifier, he ‘loses’ something, the object *a*, and a lack installs itself. The result

of this loss is the barred subject (\$), the subject of desire, and the barred other ( $\bar{A}$ ), the lacking, desiring Other. It is the 'losing' of the object *a*, the 'separation' as Lacan calls it, that provokes anxiety. In other words, in order to desire, it is necessary to 'traverse' anxiety; to keep on desiring, it is necessary to keep this — traversed — anxiety at bay — to keep the Thing at bay, as we accentuated in the part on Seminar VII (1959).

The subject in perversion and of neurosis have fundamentally different strategies to try to keep anxiety at bay.

The subject in neurosis keeps anxiety at bay by picturing a satisfying relationship with the object *a* in his phantasm, at the same time baiting the Other with a postiche object *a*. He doesn't have to give of himself.

The subject in perversion has to give of himself in order to keep anxiety at bay — by taking the position of object *a*, whether, as the subject in masochism does, as waste or, as the subject in sadism does, as an instrument — aiming, to go short, at the restitution of *a* to  $\bar{A}$  by 'being' *a*, not by 'having' *a*. Of course, this only works at privileged moments, moments of perverse passage à l'acte.

To word it differently, the subject in perversion gives of himself, of his being in order to deal with the situation. He tries to plug the hole in the Other with himself — with its own lack — whether by offering his own body as the subject in masochism, or by turning into the instrument that offers the body of the victim to the Other. This fails, save for passages à l'acte, where there is jouissance, but no subject.

To summarize: by a different operation, the subjects in sadism and masochism have ultimately the same aim: to (re-)complete the Other, to take away its lack. This comes down to taking away, to fill the Other's desire, to give it back its jouissance by restituting its object *a*. This operation is, for the pervert, ultimately transitive: there is no difference between the Other's jouissance and the pervert's jouissance, between the Other's desire and the pervert's desire.

## Conclusion

In this part, we focused on Lacan's theory of masochism and sadism, as elaborated in Seminar X (1962), in a dialectic relationship with the concepts of the object *a*, the barred Other and jouissance.

The tracing of the becoming real of the object *a* allowed us to gain a better understanding of the key concepts of S, \$, A and  $\bar{A}$ . The main point of interest for the study of perversion in general and masochism and sadism specifically, is the notion that in Seminar X (1962), lack becomes generic, while before Seminar X, it was thought of mostly as phallic. Another important step forward is the fact that the object *a* is thought of as *cause-of-desire*. It acquires a bodily aspect when it is thought of as a remainder and in its different instantiations as the lacking object of the oral, anal, phallic, scopic and invocatory drives.

Seminar X (1962) is also the Seminar in which jouissance takes the form of *absence* of desire. To paraphrase Lacan, taking him one step further: jouissance is what happens when lack comes to lack.

This generalization of lack allows Lacan to think perversion *beyond* phallic lack, *beyond* castration. Juxtaposing the phantasms of the neurotic and of the pervert, we saw that both strive for the completion of the barred Other: the neurotic by baiting him with a fake object *a*, the pervert by identifying with the object *a* that must complete the barred Other. This allowed us to differentiate structurally between neurosis and perversion.

We accentuated the idea that in perversion the subject does not enjoy without boundaries. As neurosis, perversion is a structure that needs a law to limit jouissance — a defense against the imminence of the Thing. While in neurosis, the subject desires according to the law, in perversion, desire presents itself as what lays down the law, and thus as subversion of the law, as satisfaction without restraint, as will to jouissance. But, this is only so on the surface: in fact, in perversion, desire is the support of the law, of the

complete Other as the source of the law, bringing into action a law that stops on the path of jouissance, defending the subject in perversion against the intrusion of the Real.

While phallic lack was adequate to conceptualize fetishism – with its focus on the (m)Other's phallic lack – the notion that the pervert strives to complete the Other with the object *a* allows us to conceive more clearly of sadism and masochism.

The place and the function of the object *a* in the new schema of sadistic desire allowed us to draw a clearer picture of the subject in sadism. The subject in sadism, as split subject, not only strives to realize himself as an unsplit, mythical subject, untainted by any lack (*S*). In the process, he strives to realize, to complete the Other, to turn  $\bar{A}$  into *A*. As black fetish, the object *a* stresses the incompleteness of the subject, while as voice, heralding the law, it stresses the incompleteness of the Other.

The subject in masochism is reframed by Lacan in relation to the object *a* and to the Other. Lacan pictures the subject in masochism as he who strives to make an Other appear whose desire lays down the law, by making the object *a* as voice or superego appear at its locus. The subject in masochism also *sacrifices* himself by making of himself, in a passage à l'acte, the object *a*, as a dejectum, that comes to fill what lacks in the Other — a supreme guarantee, that makes the Other's desire law.

Finally, we analyzed the symmetries and asymmetries of both positions. We zoomed in on Lacan's claim that the subject in sadism looks on the surface for the Other's anxiety, but ultimately strives for the Other's jouissance, while the subject in masochism looks on the surface for the Other's jouissance, but ultimately strives for the Other's anxiety. We argued that this way of putting things is convoluted and confusing, and that it risks masking what is common to both sadism and masochism – and, indeed for the perverse subject structure in general: it is ultimately about the completion of the Other by supplementing him with the object *a*.

As such, the Seminar on anxiety not only allows to formulate a theory on sadism and masochism, but also on perversion in general. In an abstract and general manner, perversion can be thought of as the subject structure that deals with jouissance — with the traumatic intrusion of the Real — by supplementing the lack in the Other with the subject's own lack — figured in the object *a*.

## Conclusion to the parts on sadism and masochism

Earlier, we argued that fetishism is insufficient as a paradigm to think perversion. As we discussed, the study of fetishism doesn't allow for a structural characterization of the relations of the subject of perversion to the lacking object, the Other and jouissance. In parts 3 to 7, we showed that the study of sadism and masochism does.

Mostly in their early work, both Freud and Lacan thought jouissance as reigned by the 'pleasure principle', the lacking object exclusively as phallic and the Other of the subject in fetishism exclusively as the maternal Other. As we discussed, this changes dramatically in their later work.

It was Freud, confronted with the riddle of masochism, who went beyond the pleasure principle. He discovered a death drive to account for the possibility of pleasure in pain, opening the way for Lacan to think jouissance as 'too much pleasure'. But it is only when Lacan makes the further abstraction from phallic object towards object *a* and from the mother to the Other, that a truly generic conception of sadism and masochism can be elaborated, as the subject structure in which the subject strives for jouissance by completing the lack in the Other with its own lack.

In part 3, 'Freud on sadism and masochism', we discussed Freud's long struggle with the sadist and masochist drives.

In a first moment, Freud sees sadism as a primary drive and masochism as a transformation of it. During that period, both component drives emancipate slowly from the sexual drive and gain more and more an independent character. But Freud's efforts to study the relationship between and the vicissitudes of the sadistic and masochistic drives result in a number of aporias. The turning point is "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920g), where Freud distinguishes between death drive and Eros. In a second moment,

Freud rereads the masochistic and sadistic drives as characterized by a compulsion to repeat and as instantiations of the death drive.

Unfortunately, while Freud focuses on sadism and masochism as drives, he does only rarely reflect on the subject in sadism and masochism. Also, both the lacking object and the Other of the subject in sadism and masochism are almost totally absent in Freud's theories. With Lacan, this will change dramatically.

In part 4, we discussed Lacan's views on sadism and masochism before Seminar VII (1959).

Apart from detailing a number of apparently unconnected ideas that partly form the base material for his later theorization of sadism and masochism, we mostly focused on Lacan's development of the object *a* and the lacking Other in his early Seminars.

We showed how through his work, Lacan gradually leaves an imaginary approach, and comes to think the object *a* more and more symbolically, as the interval, the cut in the chain of signifiers, but also more and more as real, as a remainder, as a pound of flesh, drawn from the body. By Seminar VI (1958), the object *a* is thought as the ransom the subject pays when confronted with the lack in the Other, with the fact that there is no Other of the Other. Through this evolution, the object *a* is Lacan's way to generalize the fetishistic object and the partial objects, including the phallus – a necessary generalization to think sadism and masochism structurally. Without jouissance, the object *a* and the lacking Other, we argued, masochism and sadism are unthinkable, and vice versa.

In part 5, we focused on Lacan's seventh Seminar (1959), where Lacan develops the concepts 'the Thing' and 'jouissance'.

The Thing is an instantiation of Lacan's major construct, the object *a*, and builds on Freud's death drive. Lacan characterizes it as the motor, the cause of desire. It is there from the origin, is separated off from the subject like a part object, and it founds the



possibility of speech. As such, it is the origin of the subject's split. The Thing is also characterized as extimate, as the real Other, and it has a particular moral status: it does 'good' when it is kept at a right distance, but it can be 'evil' when this distance is transgressed. This transgression causes *jouissance*, a construct that is elaborated in reference to the Law and the Thing, and characterized as an excess of pleasure, clarifying the idea of the possibility of "pleasure in pain", which caused Freud so much conceptual trouble. In *jouissance*, the subject disappears, while the body suffers. As Lacan will make clear in Seminar X (1962), it is the subject in perversion that aims at transgressing the distance that separates us from the *jouissance* that reaching the Thing promises.

Almost in passing by, the phantasm ( $\$ \llcorner a$ ) is characterized as the symbolic union between the split subject and the Thing, as that what keeps the Thing bay and thus as that what props up desire. In other words: desire is thought of as always having a relation to the Thing; desire is always perverse. But, while Lacan's development of the Thing as object *a* is a successful and necessary step in his development of a consistent theory on perversion, as will be clear in Seminar X (1962), his development of *jouissance* is more problematic. The aporias resulting from Lacan's reading of Sade's "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795) and of Kant's apoloques make that more than clear.

In his reading of Sade, and of what he calls the 'Sadean maxim', Lacan draws the parallel with Kant. Both authors build an ethics on the basis of a pure formalization, on the abstraction and the transgression of the 'pathological'. The only 'pathos' that is left for a rational, moral being, according to both authors, is pain. We inferred from this that such a rational ethics is a perverse ethics, in which the subject is at the service of the Other's *jouissance*: the voice of conscience in Kant's case, the promulgator of the law in Sade's case. While Kant sees the voice of conscience as part of the subject, and thus the subject as unsplit, Sade is more 'truthful': by showing that that which commands our actions, comes from outside, from the Other, he reveals the split in the subject.

While complex and granular, at the time of Seminar VII (1959), Lacan's conceptual apparatus is not yet refined enough to allow him to think sadism and masochism in a satisfactory way.

While already in this Seminar, Lacan articulates Kant's second Critique with Sade's "Philosophy in the Bedroom" (1795), arguing that this text "yields the truth of the Critique" (1966, p. 646), it will only be with the return to this question in "Kant with Sade" (1966) that Lacan will elaborate what it means to be the subject of the jouissance of the Other, and what the role of the object *a* is in sadism and masochism. In Seminar VII (1959), the groundwork for "Kant with Sade" (1966) is merely prepared. In that sense, this part was a necessary detour.

In Part 6, "Kant with Sade", Lacan explores the Sadean maxim and the Sadean phantasm. Through this exploration, he articulates the position of the subjects of sadism and masochism in terms of the relationship with jouissance, the object *a* and the Other.

Firstly, we focused on the Sadean maxim and on the three roles we distinguished in it: the author, the executor and the subject to the law. It allowed us to understand the subject in perversion as a split subject striving for its reconstitution, through an alienation of its pathos and at the cost becoming the object *a*, instrument of the jouissance of the Other.

Secondly, we studied the schema of the Sadean phantasm, build around the matheme ( $a \leftrightarrow \$$ ). We analyzed its structure, its form and its constituent parts in detail, and commented on Lacan's use of the notions 'cause', 'vel' and on the barred and the unbarred subject. The most interesting result of this analysis, is the notion that the sadist subject, aiming for jouissance, strives to take the place of the object *a* in his relation with the incomplete Other, and that the object *a* is that, what the subject tries to recomplete himself and the Other with.

We read Lacan's view on sadism in "Kant with Sade" (1966) as an abstraction and a generalization of his theory on fetishism. The fetishistic choice, for Freud, consists in the

disavowal of this lack in the (m)Other. For Lacan, as we saw, it consists in the choice to be what the mother lacks: her missing phallus. Here, Lacan's structural model for sadism, which will be generalized to all perversions, leaves behind the phallic interpretation and the focus on the relation with the mother. That what the subject in perversion strives to complete the Other with, is not any more the phallus, but the object *a*. The construct of object *a*, however, is still quite diffuse at this time in Lacan's work. That will change in Seminar X (1962).

In part 7, 'Lacan on sadism and masochism in Seminar X', the notion of the object *a* is clarified. Where before, the object *a* was characterized as the object that is the goal-of-desire, here, it unfolds as the object cause-of-desire.

Based on Lacan's schema of the division, we proposed a schema that clarifies the topology between the unsplit subject (S), the split subject (\$), the complete Other (A), the incomplete Other ( $\bar{A}$ ) and the object *a*.

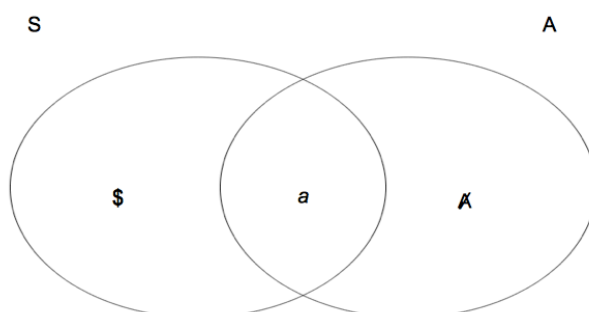


Figure 4 Figure 5 Eulerian schema of the topological relations between S, \$, A,  $\bar{A}$  and *a*

This schema accentuates the symmetry between A and S (and between  $\bar{A}$  and \$), it shows that the effects of their encounter are threefold ( $\bar{A}$ , *a* and \$), and it illustrates that the A and the S *both* split in their encounter (A into  $\bar{A}$  and *a*, S into \$ and *a*). Finally, it indicates that both  $\bar{A}$  and \$ have one thing in common: that what they lack, the *a*, which serves as an (absent) copula between both.

This schema was instrumental to our understanding of how Lacan thinks perversion in terms of the position of the split subject in relation to object *a* – here characterized as real –, to the lack of the Other, and to jouissance.

In the wake of the development of the schema of division, Lacan finally comes up with a distinctive criterion between neurosis and perversion by contrasting two figurations of the neurotic and the perverse phantasms. In the perverse phantasm, the subject is in the position of the object *a*, supplementing the lack in the Other. As we showed, this phantasm can be read as an abstraction and further development of Lacan's formula for fetishism, in which the subject in perversion supplements the (m)Other's castration by occupying the position of her phallus. It stands in contrast with the phantasm of the neurotic, in which the neurotic only phantasmatically supplements the Other, offering only a fake object *a*. He tries to keep the enigmatic desire of the Other at bay without having to give of himself.

Lacan distinguishes also two figurations of the perverse phantasm: a sadistic and a masochistic one. Lacan claims that in masochism, the subject of masochism seems to aim for the jouissance of the Other by presenting himself as object *a* to the Other, while in fact, he aims for the Other's anxiety. In sadism, on the other hand, the subject seems to aim for the anxiety of the Other, but in fact aims for the Other's jouissance.

As discussed, we found the distinction between the anxiety of the Other and the Other's jouissance unnecessary and confusing. Notwithstanding this, the relationship between the subjects in sadism and masochism is irreversible and asymmetric.

The subject in masochism takes the position of object *a* as waste or dejectum. He offers his own body to the jouissance of the Other. The subject in sadism, on the other hand, takes this position as an instrument, offering the body of the victim to the jouissance of the Other. Of course, these strategies fail, save for passages à l'acte, where there is momentary jouissance, but no subject.

To summarize: by a different operation, the subjects in sadism and masochism have ultimately the same aim: to (re-)complete the Other, to take away its lack. This comes down to taking away, to fill the Other's desire, to give it back its jouissance by restituting its object *a*. This operation is, for the pervert, ultimately transitive: there is no difference between the Other's jouissance and the pervert's jouissance, between the Other's desire and the pervert's desire.

We claimed that this structural determination of the subject in sadism and masochism is generalizable to the subject in perversion in general, that, in other words, Lacan uses sadism and masochism as paradigmatic for perversion in general. In an abstract and general manner, perversion can be thought of as the subject structure that deals with jouissance by supplementing the lack in the Other with the subject's own lack.



## General conclusion

The main question of our conceptual study was the following: How do Freud and Lacan conceptualize fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions? And, more specifically: How do Freud's theories of fetishism and masochism/sadism as paradigmatic perversions evolve in dialogue with three of his most central theoretical constructs: polymorphously perverse infantile sexuality, the uncanny perception of the missing female phallus and the death drive? How do Lacan's views of the same crystalize out of the dialectics between perversion and the key Lacanian concepts of the object *a*, the Other and *jouissance*?

In order to answer these questions, we based ourselves on the work of Freud and Lacan, of which we close-read the relevant passages. We took care to test our interpretations with secondary sources from the field of Freudian and Lacanian studies. We developed our interpretations in dialogue with authors like Miller, Nobus, Fink and Swales, who all wrote extensively on Freud, Lacan and perversion. Building on the stronger points of these authors' theories and proposing alternatives to the weaker ones, allowed us to formulate a synoptic, structural view on the subject in perversion in general.

In Freud's wake, Lacan initially sees perversion as a clinical structure in which lack – and castration, and the division of the subject, which are partially overlapping concepts – is disavowed by the subject. But Lacan's analysis goes deeper. Disavowing lack, the subject in perversion finds itself in the position of object of the drive, or, to use Lacan's terminology, as the object *a*, cause of the *jouissance* of the Other. The disavowal of lack is clearest in fetishism, while in sadism and masochism, the accent lies on the subject's position as object *a* that must complete the Other by provoking its *jouissance*.

This structural determination of perversion differs radically from the nowadays paradigmatic way to think the problem of perversion as exemplified by the DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Our hope is that this study could offer an impulse to reorient the debates

surrounding perversion, and that it could be instrumental in putting the focus in the clinic of perversion where it should be: on the subject in perversion, and not on perverse behavior.

We limited this study first and foremost by choosing the conceptual and structural lenses. We also chose to study only Freud's and Lacan's theories. By limiting ourselves to these authors, we restricted ourselves to their primary sources: the early sexologists and his own patients for Freud; the same plus a number of philosophical and literary texts for Lacan. Concerning Lacan, we limited ourselves to the works in which he speaks of perversion as a clinical structure next to neurosis and psychosis. The result is that we did not research Lacan's work beyond Seminar XI. Last but not least, we chose to focus only on the perversions that Freud and Lacan see as paradigmatic, and dealt exclusively with the male subject in perversion.

Recommendations for further research follow logically from the limitations of this study. Firstly, it would be of interest to test the structural determination of perversion quantitatively. The task that lies ahead is to translate the insights of this study into testable hypotheses on the one hand, and practical intervention strategies on the other. Secondly, a conceptual study of the *female* subject in perversion could be an interesting avenue for future research, although the source material is scarce. A starting place could be the work of Weldon (1992). Of course, studying perversion in the broader psychotherapeutic field would also be interesting. Enlarging the scope to the other perversions next to fetishism, sadism and masochism is also a promising avenue for further research. But the most important area for future research, would be a study of Lacan's view on perversions beyond perversion as a clinical structure. As found in his later work. A good starting point could be a critical reading of Seminars XIV, "The Logic of Phantasy" (1966) and XVI "From an Other to the other" (1968). Another promising avenue would be to study more recent clinical cases from authors in the Lacanian field. Serge André, Fink and Swales would be a good starting point. Last but not least, the study of the fascination for perversion in contemporary society would be of more general importance outside the field of psychology.







## Summary in Dutch – Nederlandstalige samenvatting

In deze dissertatie bestuderen we de theoretische standpunten van Freud en Lacan over fetisjisme en masochisme/sadisme. We richten ons in het bijzonder op de manier waarop beide perversies zich, op verschillende in momenten in het werk van beide auteurs, tot paradigma's distilleren waarmee perversie in het algemeen gedacht kan worden.

Onze onderzoeksvraag is de volgende: Hoe conceptualiseren Freud en Lacan fetisjisme en masochisme/sadisme als paradigmatische perversies? En, meer specifiek: Hoe evolueren Freuds theorieën over deze perversies in dialoog met drie van zijn meest centrale theoretische constructen: polymorf perverse infantiele seksualiteit, de 'unheimliche' perceptie van de ontbrekende vrouwelijke fallus en de doodsdrijf? Hoe kristalliseren Lacans theorieën over dezelfde onderwerpen zich vanuit de dialectiek van perversie met de concepten object *a*, de Ander en genot?

We bestuderen het werk van beide auteurs vanuit een Lacaniaans perspectief. We richten ons daarbij expliciet op de studie van het subject in perversie. In Lacans werk tot aan Seminarie XI (1964) wordt het subject, als bepaald door zijn relatie tot de betekenaar en tot het ontbrekend object, geconceptualiseerd als drie mutueel exclusieve subjectieve posities of klinische structuren, gekarakteriseerd door een specifieke relatie met het object *a*, met de Ander en met het genot. Deze klinische structuren zijn neurose, perversie en psychose.

Omdat Lacan perversie slechts tot aan Seminarie XI (1964) als subjectstructuur bespreekt, beperken we ons in deze studie expliciet en uitsluitend tot die periode van zijn werk. Later komt Lacan nog wel op perversie terug, maar hij behandelt het nooit meer als subjectstructuur.

De focus op het subject in perversie laat ons toe een onderscheid te maken tussen enerzijds het subject in perversie en anderzijds perverse trekken of symptomen. Deze laatste zijn vaak karakteristiek voor de eerste, maar kunnen ook gevonden worden bij

neurose of psychose. Daarom is het bespreken van perverse trekken en symptomen niet het directe doel van deze studie. We richten ons op een structurele beschrijving van het subject in perversie, niet op een fenomenologie van de perversie. De studie van het subject in perversie stelt de vraag naar wenselijkheid, normaliteit of gezondheid dus expliciet niet.

Onze benadering verschilt dan ook radicaal van het hedendaagse paradigma waarmee perversie gedacht wordt. Preciezer gesteld, het hedendaags discours, vertegenwoordigd door de DSM-V (APA, 2013), spreekt niet over perversie als subjectstructuur, maar over parafilieën als stoornissen, wat een radicaal andere aanpak veronderstelt. Door parafilieën louter als stoornissen te behandelen focust het hedendaags discours zich exclusief op ongewenst gedrag of op perverse trekken. Zo wordt de vraag naar de structuur en naar het subject in perversie achterwege gelaten.

Voor Freud en Lacan treden de voornaamste structurele kwaliteiten van perversie het meest op de voorgrond in twee soorten perversie, die in fine structureel gelijk zijn, maar verschillende structurele trekken in de verf zetten: enerzijds fetisjisme, anderzijds sadisme en masochisme. In lijn met de chronologische ontwikkeling van het werk van beide auteurs, bestuderen we eerst het fetisjisme en vervolgens het sadisme en het masochisme. Andere perversies, zoals exhibitionisme, voyeurisme, perverse homoseksualiteit en pedofilie, worden nu en dan wel door Freud en Lacan besproken, maar leren ons weinig over perversie als subjectstructuur. We bespreken ze dan ook niet in detail.

In deze studie richten we ons ook exclusief op de perversie bij de man. Hoewel Freud noch Lacan het bestaan van perversie bij de vrouw negeren, wordt het bij geen van beide auteurs uitgediept. Wanneer ze het dan toch vermelden, dan is het op de basis van of in contrast met perversie bij de man.

Beide auteurs bestuderen fetisjisme en sadisme/ niet alleen als paradigma's die hen toelaten het subject in perversie structureel beter te begrijpen. De 'raadsels' van beide

perversies spelen ook een cruciale rol in de ontwikkeling van hun theorieën over het subject in het algemeen. Het bestuderen van deze ‘raadsels’ opent voor hen de mogelijkheden om de positie van het subject in relatie tot de drift radicaal anders te denken – voor Freud in relatie met de doodsdrift, voor Lacan in relatie tot het genot – en, op basis daarvan, om het object radicaal anders te denken – voor Freud als altijd reeds ontbrekend, voor Lacan als object *a*.

De bronnen waarop beide auteurs zich baseren, zijn verschillend. Freud vertrekt vanuit het werk van de vroege seksuologen en vanuit zijn eigen klinische ervaring. Lacan vertrekt vanuit Freud en vanuit de eigen kliniek, maar steunt vaak ook op filosofische en literaire teksten. In die zin is de Lacaniaanse kliniek van de perversie vooral een tekstuele.

De impact van de studie van perversie op de theorie van de psyché in het algemeen is een belangrijk onderliggend thema van ons onderzoek. Daarom opteren we om de context en de mogelijkhedenvoorwaarden van Freuds en Lacans theorieën over de perversie diepgaand te bestuderen. Nu en dan zullen we dan ook thema’s en concepten behandelen die op het eerste gezicht minder relevant kunnen lijken voor de studie van de perversie. We hopen echter dat deze omwegen de lezer zullen voorzien van een aantal onmisbare inzichten om tot een breder begrip te komen van de context waarin de theorieën van beide auteurs het licht zien – en, vooral, van de theorieën zelf.

Ons proefschrift is logisch opgedeeld in vier delen: Freud over fetisjisme, Lacan over fetisjisme, Freud over masochisme/sadisme en Lacan over masochisme/sadisme. Deze indeling weerspiegelt sleutelaspecten van onze onderzoeksvraag: Hoe conceptualiseren Freud en Lacan fetisjisme en masochisme/sadisme als paradigmatische perversies? En, meer specifiek: Hoe evolueren Freuds theorieën over deze perversies in dialoog met drie van zijn meest centrale theoretische constructen: polymorf perverse infantiele seksualiteit, de onbehaaglijke perceptie van de ontbrekende vrouwelijke fallus en de doodsdrift? Hoe kristalliseren Lacans theorieën over dezelfde onderwerpen vanuit de dialectiek van perversie met de concepten gemis, het object *a*, de Ander en genot?

We behandelen deze vragen via een conceptuele studie waarin de relevante werken van Freud en Lacan in detail bestudeerd worden. We richten ons eerst en vooral op een close-reading van sleutelteksten van beide auteurs die direct het hoofdthema van ons proefschrift behandelen, maar ook op een aantal teksten die het conceptuele raamwerk bevatten die de lezer toelaten de ontwikkeling van de gedachtegang van beide auteurs over ons onderwerp in detail te volgen. Ten tweede bestuderen we de relevante secundaire bronnen die andere close-readings of interpretaties bieden van de teksten die we behandelen. Miller, Nobus, Fink en Swales zijn daarbij de belangrijkste auteurs. Waar passend, openen we een dialoog met deze tekst om onze studie duidelijk in het veld van de Freudiaanse en Lacaniaanse studies te positioneren.

Onderstaand geven we een kort overzicht van de verschillende onderdelen van onze verhandeling.

## Het fetisjisme

### Deel 1: Freud over fetisjisme

Freuds vroege gedachten over fetisjisme zijn veel verschuldigd aan Charcot, Binet en Krafft-Ebing. Deze auteurs beweren dat men in 'normale liefde' fetisjistische aspecten of eigenschappen vindt, die echter harmonieus worden geordend en tot 'normale' seksuele omgang leiden. Daarom kan het gedrag van de fetisjist niet worden weerhouden als onderscheidende criterium voor fetisjisme. De vroege seksuologen vinden dit criterium in een subjectieve psychische toestand die zijn wortels vindt in de combinatie van het ontwaken van genitale excitatie met een op zich banale externe gebeurtenis. Deze associatie van ideeën kristalliseert tot een fetisj die fungeert als een teken in een talig scenario dat op een intense, niet-standaard manier instrumenteel is voor het reguleren van seksueel genot. Bij fetisjisten kan men een ambivalente houding vinden tegenover de fetisj, en een specifieke relatie met de wet.

Hoewel al deze elementen Freud beïnvloedden, gaat zijn conceptualisering van fetisjisme veel verder. Freuds eigen ideeën over fetisjisme ontwikkelen zich in drie fasen, waarin een geleidelijk verschuiving merkbaar is van de studie van het object van fetisjisme naar de studie van het subject in fetisjisme.

In de eerste periode van het bestuderen van fetisjisme (rond 1900-1905) blijft Freud grotendeels schatplichtig aan de seksuologen. Dat is het duidelijkst in zijn idee dat 'normale' volwassen seksualiteit zijn oorsprong vindt in de polymorf perverse infantiele seksualiteit. Het nieuwe idee van de fetisj die de ontbrekende penis van de vrouw vertegenwoordigt, stamt echter ook uit deze eerste periode. Freud combineert het met het idee van een symbolische verbinding tussen de fetisj en een belangrijke kinderherinnering, een idee dat ook al bij Binet te vinden is.

In de tweede periode (1905-1920) spelen de concepten van het castratie-complex en de loochening van de afwezigheid van een penis bij vrouwen een belangrijke rol. Ze worden echter nog niet met perversie in verband gebracht.

In de derde en laatste periode worden deze begrippen gearticuleerd met fetisjisme in twee hoofdteksten: "Fetisjisme" (1927e) en "De splitsing van het Ik in het afweerproces" (1940e 1938). In deze teksten verdiept Freud zijn theorie over de oorsprong van het fetisjisme en verruimt die tot een theorie over de perversie in het algemeen. Verder zien we dat Freud het accent verplaatst van het object van fetisjisme naar het subject in fetisjisme. Hij onderscheidt drie hoofdkenmerken: een splitsing van het Ik, een taalgebonden reguleringsmechanisme van seksueel genot, gecentreerd rond het tekenkarakter van de fetisj, en een ontkenning van seksuele differentiatie.

Met zijn focus op fetisjisme legt Freud zijn vinger op het bestaan van een seksueel genot dat verder gaat dan de lust-economie. Het is echter slechts wanneer Freud het sadisme en het masochisme nauwkeuriger bestudeert, dat hij de doodsdrijf ontdekt, wat hem in staat stelt dit raadselachtig genot te verklaren. Lacan zal verder werken op dit idee van overmatig genot.

Op het niveau van het object zet Freud een eerste stap op het pad dat Lacan tot de ontwikkeling zijn theorie van het object *a* zal leiden. Freuds ontdekking betreft hier een specifiek object als oorzaak van het verlangen van het subject. Dit specifieke object is de fetisj, begrepen als invulling van het ontbrekende fallisch object. Het wordt gekenmerkt door één particulier, bevroren teken.

Er zijn een aantal minder solide punten in Freuds theorie. In de eerste plaats geeft Freud nooit een antwoord op de vraag naar het 'waarom' van de fetisjistische 'keuze'. Ten tweede wordt het verband tussen taal, seksualiteit en perversie wel aangetoond, maar blijft het conceptueel onderontwikkeld. Ten derde komt Freud nooit tot een gedetailleerde articulatie van fetisjisme met zijn tweede, complexere theorie van de psyché, waarin de doodsdrijf centraal staat. Zoals we in het tweede deel bespreken, behandelt Lacan deze onderwerpen op een meer bevredigende manier.

## Deel 2: Lacan over fetisjisme

Lacans kerngedachten over het fetisjisme zijn te vinden in Seminarie IV (1956). Daar bestudeert hij de structuur van het subject in perversie via een analyse van het fetisjisme. Deze analyse is gebaseerd op zijn theorie over het ontbreken van het object, die we in detail bestuderen.

Lacan ziet drie manieren waarop het object kan ontbreken: reële privatie – we verkiezen dit neologisme om het Franse 'privation' te vertalen –, imaginaire frustratie en symbolische castratie. Hij beschrijft fetisjisme als een van de mogelijke posities van het subject in relatie tot privatie. Op een bepaald moment in de ontwikkeling bevindt het subject zich in een onhoudbare, beangstigende situatie: in een hoekpunt van een imaginaire driehoek waarvan de andere hoekpunten ingenomen worden door de moeder en de fallus. Zonder tussenkomst van de vader als vierde term bestaat de 'oplossing' voor het subject uit een identificatie met de fallus. Het subject wil voor de moeder de fallus 'zijn', wat volgens Lacan kenmerkend is voor perversie in het algemeen.



Op basis van zijn theorie over het ontbrekend object verbreedt Lacan zijn theorie van het fetisjisme. Daarbij wordt Freuds concept 'dekherinnering' aangevuld met de begrippen 'sluier' en het 'Jenseits'. Lacan thematiseert ook het teken-karakter van de fetisj, een notie die doet denken aan de rol die de fetisj speelt in Freuds gevalstudie van de "glans op de neus". Lacan karakteriseert de fetisj als een metonymie, waarin de waarde van een betekenaar op een andere betekenaar wordt overgedragen. Hoewel de fetisj als een teken fungeert, heeft het echter ook de vorm van een beeld, als een scherm dat het subject in fetisjisme beschermt tegen de castratiedreiging. Als beeld is de fetisj niet-dialectisch en blijft het geïsoleerd en als het ware versteend.

Het is in het 'Jenseits' dat de fetisjist paroxysmaal, a-historische lust beleeft. We argumenteren dat dit paroxysmaal, a-historisch plezier Lacan op het spoor brengt van het concept genot ('jouissance'). De fetisj ligt op zijn beurt aan de oorsprong van Lacan's ontwikkeling van het object *a*. Zoals we in deel 4 bespreken, zal de uitwerking van deze twee concepten Lacan helpen om de relatie tussen het subject in perversie en zijn Ander te formuleren. Deze relatie wordt later in zijn werk geabstraheerd en gegeneraliseerd tot de relatie waar het subject zich in de positie bevindt waarin hij het tekort van de Ander opvult.

## Het sadisme en het masochisme

### Deel 3: Freud over sadisme en masochisme

Voor Freud zijn sadisme en masochisme cruciale concepten. Ze bekleden een centrale plaats in zijn theorie. Het raadsel van het masochisme noopt Freud meer dan eens tot het drastisch herzien van zijn meta-psychologische theorieën. Het is de voornaamste drijfveer tot het postuleren van de doodsdrijf, en tot het uitwerken van een tweede topologisch model van de psyché.

Freud conceptualiseert sadisme en masochisme vooral als driften, en slechts zelden als klinische structuren. In deel 3 volgen we de evolutie van zijn opvattingen over deze driften in detail.

In een eerste moment (rond 1900) ziet Freud sadisme als een primaire drift en masochisme als daarvan afgeleid. Tussen 1900 en 1919 emanciperen beide driften zich langzaam van de seksuele drift. Freud ontwikkelt de notie van een vermenging van de driften. In “Driften en hun lotgevallen” (1915c) en in “Een kind wordt geslagen” (1919e) verfijnt Freud zijn conceptueel apparaat om de relaties tussen sadistische en masochistische driften te onderzoeken. Desondanks lukt het hem niet om terdege verantwoording af te leggen van de aard van deze driften. In “Een kind wordt geslagen” zet Freud een stap voorwaarts. De analyse van de straf-fantasie zet hem ertoe aan om perversie in het algemeen in verband te brengen met het incestueuze object en dus met het Oedipuscomplex. Een falende Oedipus wordt hier gezien als de wortel van perversie in het algemeen.

Slechts een jaar later, geconfronteerd met de traumatische ervaringen van soldaten die terugkeren van de loopgraven, beschrijft Freud de masochistische drift als gekenmerkt door herhalingsdwang. Dit leidt hem in “Voorbij het lustprincipe” (1920g) om een radicaal nieuw onderscheid te maken: het onderscheid tussen doodsdrift en Eros. In het “Masochisme als economisch probleem” (1924c) past hij dit nieuwe inzicht in detail toe op het masochisme. Masochisme wordt een primaire drift, en paradigmatisch voor de doodsdrift.

Er zitten een aantal lacunes in Freuds theorieën over masochisme en sadisme. Eerst en vooral spreekt hij over masochisme en sadisme als driften, en zelden of nooit over het subject in sadisme of masochisme. Ten tweede worden noch de relatie tot het object, noch de relatie tot de Ander in de context van sadisme en masochisme besproken.

#### Deel 4: Lacan over sadisme en masochisme voor Seminarie VII

Voor Seminarie VI (1958) spreekt Lacan over sadisme en masochisme in verschillende, slechts los verbonden plaatsen. In zijn zoektocht naar een differentiatie tussen neurose en perversie probeert Lacan verschillende benaderingen, die de algemene evolutie van zijn werk volgen. In een eerste fase beklemtoont hij de imaginaire orde, in een tweede ligt het accent op de symbolische orde en in een laatste periode valt de nadruk op het Reële. Zoals hierboven getoond, vallen deze fasen vaak samen of lopen ze door elkaar.

Tijdens deze periode zien een aantal interessante ideeën het licht. We bespreken het idee dat perversie altijd intersubjectief is, het idee dat het subject in perversie in het fantasme de positie van het object inneemt en, last but not least, het idee van een enigmatische, gesubjectieveerde rest, een idee dat Lacan's latere accentuering van het object *a* als reëel lijkt voor te bereiden.

In Seminarie VI (1958) articuleert Lacan zijn visie op perversie met een belangrijke fase in zijn elaboratie van het object *a* en het fantasme.

In het begin van het Seminarie analyseert hij het object *a* nog steeds als imaginair, gebaseerd op het beeld van de andere (*i (a)*). Verder in het Seminar introduceert Lacan steeds vaker symbolische elementen in zijn beschrijvingen van het object *a*: de betekenaar, het scenario, de ketting en de privatie van de symbolische fallus. We bespreken ook enkele pogingen tot beschrijving van het object *a* die verder gaan, en reeds verwijzen naar het reële. Zo wordt het object *a* beschouwd als een rest, als een pond vlees, uit het lichaam gesneden, maar ook als het interval in de keten van betekenaars. Object *a* is het losgeld dat het subject betaalt wanneer het geconfronteerd wordt met het tekort in de Ander, met het feit dat er geen Ander van de Andere is. Het is Lacan's manier om de fetisj en de partiële objecten, inclusief de fallus, te veralgemenen. We beweren dat deze generalisatie noodzakelijk is om sadisme en masochisme als subjectstructuur te denken.

Zonder object *a*, betogen we, is perversie ondenkbaar, en vice-versa.

## Deel 5: Lacan over sadisme en masochisme in Seminarie VII

In zijn zevende Seminarie, “De ethiek van de psychoanalyse” (1959), ontwikkelt Lacan het concept “Ding”. We lezen het Ding als een instantie van het object *a* dat voortbouwt op Freuds doodsdrijf.

Het is ook in dit Seminarie dat het concept ‘genot’ vorm krijgt. Het wordt uitgewerkt in relatie met de Wet en het Ding, en wordt gekarakteriseerd als excessief plezier. Dit verheldert het idee van de mogelijkheid van “plezier in pijn”, of van “lust in onlust”, dat Freud zoveel problemen bezorgde. Het is net dit concept dat voor Lacan de sleutel vormt om later perversie structureel te denken.

Lacans complexe conceptuele evoluties in dit Seminarie zijn belangrijk voor het begrijpen van zijn latere theorie over het sadisme en het masochisme. Daarom bestuderen we deze evoluties in detail. In die zin is dit deel een noodzakelijke omweg.

Ondanks de complexiteit van Lacans conceptuele apparaat is het echter nog niet voldoende verfijnd om sadisme en masochisme op een bevredigende manier te theoretiseren. Eén van de ontbrekende puzzelstukken is een bestudering van wat het betekent het subject van het genot van de Ander te zijn. Hoewel Lacan deze notie al in dit Seminarie via een confrontatie van Kants tweede kritiek met Sade’s “Filosofie in het boudoir” (1795) articuleert, en claimt dat de Sade lezen de verborgen waarheid van Kant naar boven haalt, zal het ontbrekende puzzelstuk pas echt vorm krijgen wanneer Lacan beide auteurs opnieuw bestudeert in “Kant met Sade” (1966).

## Deel 6: Lacan over sadisme en masochisme in Kant met Sade

In “Kant met Sade” construeert Lacan het sadiaans maxime en het sadiaans fantasme. De positie van het subject in perversie wordt er bestudeerd in relatie met het object *a* en de Ander.

Lacan's formulering en analyse van het sadiaans maxime is de grondslag voor de latere ontwikkeling van de relatie tussen het subject in perversie en de Ander, en voor de interpretatie van de complexe relatie tussen het subject en de Ander in het algemeen. Voor dit doel gebruikt Lacan een reeks rijke noties, ideeën en concepten die we nader onderzoeken: de niet-wederkerigheid van intersubjectiviteit, het belang van het 'kerygma', pijn als middel tot pervers genot en tenslotte de status van het object van de wet. Voor het bestuderen van perversie is de belangrijkste notie zeker dat het subject in perversie zich richt op het genot van de Ander.

Terwijl Lacans pogingen om de relatie tussen het subject en de ander te verduidelijken hier gedeeltelijk falen, vormen ze een noodzakelijke stap tot Lacans perversietheorie in Seminarie X (1962), waar de relatie tussen het subject in perversie en zijn Ander een stabielere vorm krijgen.

Hetzelfde kan gezegd worden over Lacan's schema van het sadiaans fantasme. We analyseren de structuur, de vorm en de onderdelen ervan in detail, en becommentariëren Lacan's gebruik van de noties 'oorzaak', 'vel', het gespleten subject (\$) en het niet gespleten subject (S). Het interessantste resultaat van deze analyse is de mogelijkheid om het subject in perversie te begrijpen als een gespleten subject dat streeft naar reconstitutie door een vervreemding van zijn pathos. De prijs die het daarvoor betaalt, is dat hij het voorwerp van het genot van de Ander wordt.

## Deel 7: Lacan over sadisme en masochisme in Seminarie X

In seminarie X (1962) denkt Lacan angst anders dan Freud: als een subjectieve ervaring die niet zonder object is. Op dit punt in zijn werk wordt het begrip van het object *a* verder verduidelijkt als object van de angst. Waar het object *a* eerst werd gekenmerkt als object-doel-van-verlangen, ontvouwt het hier zich hier als object-oorzaak-van-verlangen.

Het is in deze context dat Lacan perversie opnieuw conceptualiseert als bepaald door de positie van het subject in relatie tot object *a*, het tekort van de Ander en het genot. In zijn

schema van het perverse fantasme bevindt het subject zich in de positie van het object *a*, in een poging het tekort in de Ander op te vullen.

We zien in dit fantasme een abstractie en verdere ontwikkeling van Lacans formule voor fetisjisme, waarbij het subject de castratie van de moeder als de eerste Ander aanvult door zelf de positie van haar ontbrekende fallus in te nemen.

Lacan onderscheidt een masochistische en een sadistische figuratie van het perverse fantasme. Volgens Lacan lijkt het subject in masochisme te doelen op het genot van de Ander door zichzelf als object *a* aan de Ander over te leveren, terwijl hij er eigenlijk naar streeft de Andere angst in te boezemen. In sadisme daarentegen lijkt het subject net de angst van de Andere te willen opwekken, terwijl hij er echter naar streeft de Ander te laten genieten.

Zoals besproken volgen we Lacan niet in zijn onderscheid tussen angst en genot. We interpreteren angst louter als een vorm van genot. Als dusdanig staat het Seminarie over angst ons niet alleen toe een theorie over het subject in sadisme en masochisme formuleren, maar ook over het subject in perversie in het algemeen. We concluderen dat perversie structurele beschouwd kan worden als de subjectstructuur die omgaat met genot door het tekort in de Ander op te vullen met het eigen tekort van het subject.

## Bespreking

In de bespreking van ons proefschrift concluderen we eerst dat Lacan Freuds conceptualisering van perversie abstraheert tot een meer generieke, echt structurele theorie. Waar Freuds standpunten over fetisjisme en masochisme/sadisme debet zijn aan een op de fysiologie gebaseerde driftenleer en steeds gekleurd worden door een fenomenologische aanpak van deze perversies, verwoordt Lacan perversie als de subjectstructuur waarin het subject in de positie van het object *a*, oorzaak van het genot van de Ander is.

Ten tweede concluderen we ook dat Freuds en Lacans preoccupatie met perversie onlosmakelijk samenhangen met de ontwikkeling van hun theorieën over de psyché in het algemeen. Voor Freud leidt de studie naar de masochistische en sadistische driften tot de ontdekking van de doodstraf. Voor Lacan leidt de articulatie van fetisjisme met het tekort in de vorm van privatie tot de verfijning van het concept object *a*, terwijl de analyse van masochisme en sadisme hem de weg openen naar de concepten 'gespleten Ander' en 'genot'.

## Abstract in Dutch - Nederlandstalige abstract

We onderzoeken hoe Lacan Freuds conceptualisering van perversie abstraheert tot een generieke, theorie over de perverse subjectstructuur. Door te focussen op het subject in perversie, trachten we een alternatief te bieden voor het dominante discours over perversie, dat vertegenwoordigd wordt door de DMS V, die focust op perverse trekken en pervers gedrag.

We doen dat via een conceptuele studie en via close-reading van de relevante passages van de werken van beide auteurs, aangevuld met secundaire bronnen uit het freudiaanse en lacaniaanse veld.

Waar Freuds standpunten over fetisjisme en masochisme/sadisme debet zijn aan een op de fysiologie gebaseerde driftenleer en steeds gekleurd worden door een fenomenologische aanpak, analyseert Lacan perversie als de subjectstructuur waarin het subject omgaat met genot door het tekort in de Ander op te vullen met het eigen tekort.

We tonen aan hoe Freuds en Lacans preoccupatie met perversie onlosmakelijk samenhangen met de ontwikkeling van hun theorieën over de psyché in het algemeen. Voor Freud leidt de studie naar de masochistische en sadistische driften tot de ontdekking van de doodstraf. Voor Lacan leidt de articulatie van fetisjisme met het tekort in de vorm van privatie tot de verfijning van zijn visie op het gespleten subject, terwijl de analyse van masochisme en sadisme hem de weg openen naar de concepten object *a*, de gespleten Ander en het genot.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For the Lacanian subject as hypokeimenon, see, a.o. De Kesel (2009, pp. 205-206), Borch-Jacobsen (2003, pp. 83-85), Bonazzi (2014, pp. 124-125).

<sup>2</sup> See also Lacan (1966, p. 819).

<sup>3</sup> For psychosis as a structure opposed to neurosis, see for example Lacan (1955, pp. 136-137).

<sup>4</sup> For perversion as a structure, see for example Lacan (1964, p. 168).

<sup>5</sup> Lacan never uses this term, but his editor, Miller, uses it as the title of the first part of Seminar IV (1956).

<sup>6</sup> Own translation: ils constituent simplement quelques-unes des variétés séméiologiques sous lesquels peuvent se présenter les dégénérés.

<sup>7</sup> Own translation: Mais qu'à la place des clous de souliers, de bonnets de nuit, ou de tablier blanc on considère que l'obsession ait l'homme pour objet, les phénomènes se dérouleront de la même manière.

<sup>8</sup> Own translation: les mêmes luttes, les mêmes résistances, les mêmes angoisses, et habituellement, coûte que coûte, la satisfaction finale du besoin maladif.

<sup>9</sup> Own translation: il faut des terrains de choix (prédisposition héréditaire, dégénérescence) pour que pareille floraison puisse se produire; aussi, vient-on à fouiller dans la vie pathologique de ces individus, on ne manque pas [...] de découvrir un état névro ou psychopathique des plus profonds.

<sup>10</sup> Own translation: Vers l'âge de six ou sept ans, M. X... était déjà poussé par un instinct irrésistible à regarder les pieds des femmes pour voir s'il n'y avait pas de clous à leurs souliers; lorsqu'il y en avait, la vue de ces clous lui produisait dans tout son être un bonheur indéfinissable. Deux jeunes filles, ses parentes, logeaient dans sa famille; il se rendait dans l'endroit où leurs souliers étaient déposés; il s'en emparait d'une main fiévreuse et frissonnante; il touchait les clous, il les comptait, il ne pouvait pas en détacher ses regards, et le soir, dans son lit, il reportait sa pensée, alternativement, sur l'une ou l'autre de ses jeunes filles, et il lui faisait jouer un rôle fantastique qu'il imaginait; il voyait sa mère la conduire chez le cordonnier, il l'entendait commander de garnir de clous les souliers de sa fille, il voyait le cordonnier poser les clous et remettre les souliers à la jeune fille; puis, il cherchait à se rendre compte des sensations que celle-ci éprouvait en marchant avec ses souliers à clous; enfin, il infligeait à la jeune fille les tortures les plus cruelles, il lui clouait des fers sous les pieds, comme l'on fait aux chevaux, ou bien il lui coupait des pieds, et en même temps il se masturbait.

<sup>11</sup> Own translation: une de ces histoires fantastiques [...] lui revenait à l'esprit, phrase par phrase

<sup>12</sup> Own translation: l'intensité du spasme [...] n'est pas toujours la même, elle varie suivant les circonstances: elle est moindre, par exemple, si M. X..., causant avec un cordonnier, celui-ci lui parle d'une manière générale, des clous que l'on met aux chaussures de femmes; elle est plus forte s'il est question de femmes qu'il connaît, ou, si on lui dit: *mettre des clous à des bottines de femmes*, le cordonnier dit: *ferre des bottines de femmes*, et mieux encore *ferre des femmes*.

<sup>13</sup> Own translation: L'impression est parfois telle, qu'il est sur le point de s'évanouir, ou bien il est pris d'un rire nerveux et incoercible, qui dure plusieurs minutes.

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<sup>14</sup> Own translation: il aurait voulu que l'éjaculation n'eût pas lieu, parce qu'elle l'empêchait de continuer et de finir son histoire, et qu'il préférait de beaucoup le plaisir qu'il ressentait de l'histoire, à celui que l'éjaculation lui procurait.

<sup>15</sup> Own translation: A l'âge de cinq ans, ayant couché pendant cinq mois dans le même lit qu'un parent âgé d'une trentaine d'années, il éprouva pour la première fois un phénomène singulier, c'était une excitation génitale et l'érection, dès qu'il apercevait son compagnon de lit se coiffer d'un bonnet de nuit. Vers cette même époque, il avait l'occasion de voir se déshabiller une veille servante, et dès que celle-ci mettait sur sa tête une coiffe de nuit, il se sentait très excité et l'érection se produisait immédiatement. Plus tard l'idée seule d'une tête de veille femme ridée et laide, mais coiffée d'un bonnet de nuit, provoquait l'orgasme génital.

<sup>16</sup> Own translation: il a des hallucinations la nuit, celles-ci ont déjà fait leur apparition à l'âge de dix ans [...] il voit plus habituellement une bête noire qui veut le saisir au cou.

<sup>17</sup> Own translation: L'adoration de ces malades pour des objets inertes comme des bonnets de nuit ou des clous de bottines ressemble de tous points à l'adoration du sauvage ou du nègre pour des arêtes de poissons ou pour des cailloux brillants, sauf cette différence fondamentale que, dans le culte de nos malades, l'adoration religieuse est remplacée par un appétit sexuel.

<sup>18</sup> Own translation: le penchant que les sujets éprouvent pour des objets qui sont incapables de satisfaire normalement leurs besoins génitaux [...] ils offrent en commun ce caractère bien curieux de consister dans un appétit sexuel qui présente une *insertion vicieuse*, c'est-à-dire qui s'applique à des objets auxquels normalement il ne s'applique pas.

<sup>19</sup> Own translation: l'étude directe du symptôme, dans l'analyse de sa formation et de son mécanisme, dans la lumière que ces cas morbides font sur la psychologie de l'amour.

<sup>20</sup> Own translation: Pourquoi aime-t-on telle personne plutôt que telle autre ?

<sup>21</sup> Own translation: Le fétichisme ne se distingue donc de l'amour normal que par le degré : on peut dire qu'il est en germe dans l'amour normal ; il suffit que le germe grossisse pour que la perversion apparaisse.

<sup>22</sup> Own translation: dans l'amour normal le fétichisme est polythéiste : il résulte, non pas d'une excitation unique, mais d'une myriade d'excitations ; c'est une symphonie. Où commence la pathologie ? C'est au moment où l'amour d'un détail quelconque devient prépondérant, au point d'effacer tous les autres.

<sup>23</sup> Own translation: il y a une dose constante de fétichisme dans l'amour le plus régulier.

<sup>24</sup> Own translation: Un homme riche, distingué, intelligent épouse une femme sans jeunesse, ni beauté, ni esprit, ni rien de ce qui attire la généralité des hommes ; il y a peut-être dans ces unions une sympathie d'odeur ou quelque chose d'analogue : c'est du *petit fétichisme*.

<sup>25</sup> Own translation: des dégénérés qui éprouvent une excitation génitale intense pendant la contemplation de certains objets inanimés qui laissent complètement indifférent un individu normal.

<sup>26</sup> Own translation: l'obsession, d'abord fixée sur les tabliers blancs, s'est étendue progressivement à tous les objets blancs ; un linge flottant, et même un mur blanchi à la chaux suffisent à provoquer la réaction sexuelle.

<sup>27</sup> Own translation: le culte s'adresse à une fraction de la personne, ou à une émanation de la personne.

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- <sup>28</sup> Own translation: Les objets matériels de ce culte de l'amour sont surtout aimés parce qu'ils rappellent une personne : ils ont donc principalement une valeur d'emprunt. Dans d'autres cas, on voit la chose inerte acquérir une sorte d'indépendance ; elle est aimée non plus pour la personne dont elle évoque l'image, mais pour elle-même.
- <sup>29</sup> Own translation: nous trouvons une coïncidence entre l'excitation génitale et un fait extérieur ; la coïncidence se change en association d'idées [...] à un âge où toutes les associations sont fortes, [...] voilà la source de l'obsession.
- <sup>30</sup> Own translation: Quant aux causes du fétichisme décrit jusqu'ici, elles sont difficiles à démêler. L'hérédité d'abord, comme préparation.
- <sup>31</sup> Own translation: Mais l'hérédité, à notre avis, n'est pas capable de donner à cette maladie sa forme caractéristique ; quand un individu adore les clous de bottine, et un autre les yeux de femme, ce n'est pas l'hérédité qui est chargée d'expliquer pourquoi leur obsession porte sur tel objet plutôt que sur tel autre.
- <sup>32</sup> Own translation: Dans les observations précédentes, on vient de voir qu'un accident, qui par lui-même est tout à fait insignifiant, est parvenu à se graver en traits profonds et indélébiles dans la mémoire de ces malades.
- <sup>33</sup> Own translation: Il faut remarquer que, dans l'évolution de la perversion sexuelle, l'abstraction conduit à la *généralisation*. Le malade ne s'attache pas uniquement à une personne en particulier : son amour n'est pas individualiste.
- <sup>34</sup> Own translation: La nécessité de fixer par un mot qui serve de signe ces petites nuances fuyantes du sentiment nous fait adopter le terme d'*abstraction*.
- <sup>35</sup> Own translation: il trouve un plaisir ardent à répéter des mots qui sont destinés à aviver l'image de ces objets ; ainsi, il se complait dans l'expression : "*Ferrer* une femme".
- <sup>36</sup> Own translation: Cet amour hors nature a une tendance à produire la continence ; disons mieux, il produit une impuissance de cause psychique.
- <sup>37</sup> Own translation: l'érection arrive par la seule contemplation de l'objet. Une excitation génitale aussi intense dépasse un peu le taux normal
- <sup>38</sup> Own translation: L'amour normal est harmonieux; l'amant aime au même degré tous les éléments de la femme qu'il aime, toutes les parties de son corps et toutes les manifestations de son esprit. Dans la perversion sexuelle, nous ne voyons apparaître en somme aucun élément nouveau ; seulement l'harmonie est rompue ; l'amour, au lieu d'être excité par l'ensemble de la personne, n'est plus excité que par une fraction. Ici, la partie se substitue au tout, l'accessoire devient le principal. Au polythéisme répond le monothéisme. L'amour du pervers est une pièce de théâtre où un simple figurant s'avance vers la rampe et prend la place du premier rôle.
- <sup>39</sup> Remark the term overvaluation, which Freud takes over from Binet.
- <sup>40</sup> Lacan (1955, pp. 192-193).
- <sup>41</sup> For an interesting view on Freud's 'two theories on fetishism', see Whitebook (1995, pp. 41-55)
- <sup>42</sup> For an interesting take on the Oedipus complex, cf. Verhaeghe (2009).

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Freud (1905d, p. 154).

<sup>44</sup> Jones (1961) and Gay (1995).

<sup>45</sup> On neurosis as the negative of perversion, cf. a.o. Evans (1996, pp. 306-309), Green (1999); Eidelberg (1954); Makari (1997).

<sup>46</sup> On afterwardsness, see also Geyskens (2005, p.6).

<sup>47</sup> On disavowal, see Dor (1998, pp. 81-91).

<sup>48</sup> Geller (2007) analyses Freud's paper "Fetishism" in quite some detail, making a whole case around the fact that Freud does not mention the homophony between Glanz, glance and glans (the Latin term for penis) – basing himself on Lacan and Granoff (1956). Unfortunately, Geller doesn't analyze the linguistic quality of the fetish.

<sup>49</sup> See Lacan and Granoff (1956, p. 267): "From 'Glanz auf der Nase' to the female penis, passing through 'Glance on the Nose', the passage is strictly incomprehensible unless one has stuck to the path which Freud indicated. At the entrance of this path stands an inscription which reads, 'What is its meaning?' ". Lacan and Granoff also mention the homophony between Glanze, glance and glans.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. a.o. Geller (2007), Gillespie (1940), Kohon (1987), Payne (1939), Pillsbury (1932), Whitebook (1995).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. a.o. Lacan and Granoff (1956), Miller (You are the Woman..., n.d.).

<sup>52</sup> Own translation: Ce qui est intéressant avec le fétiche, c'est qu'il introduit dans la relation du sujet à l'Autre un objet.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Lacan (1958, p. 248).

<sup>54</sup> A similar, but much simplified account of fetishism is to be found in a paper from Granoff that Lacan co-singed at the demand of the editor. Granoff discusses a case of fetishism to illustrate the difference between an dual-imaginary and a triadic-symbolical relation (Lacan and Granoff, 1956).

<sup>55</sup> For a good analysis of Lacan's critique of Bouvet and the object-theorists, see De Kesel (2009, pp. 16-20).

<sup>56</sup> For a good overview of Seminar IV (1956), cf. Safouan (2001, pp. 59-74). For introductions to Lacan's object lack theory, cf. Dor (1998, pp. 102-107), Diatkine (2005, The Real), Schindler (2004, pp. 101-125), Razavet (2008, pp. 113-114). For Lacan on fetishism as paradigm of perversion in Seminar IV (1956), cf. Nobus (2000, pp. 39-42). For an interesting view on Lacan and fetishism, cf. Tostain (1980, pp. 247-260), Swales (2012, pp. 69-71).

<sup>57</sup> Own translation: tentatives de Lacan en vue de l'élaboration d'une théorie des perversions en général et de l'objet fétiche en particulier.

<sup>58</sup> I translate Freud's 'Trieb' as drive, not as instinct, the translation the Standard Edition gives.

<sup>59</sup> Own translation: On ne peut poser correctement le problème des relations d'objet qu'à partir d'un certain cadre qui doit être considéré comme fondamental pour la compréhension. Ce cadre, ou le premier de ces cadres, c'est que dans le monde humain, la structure comme le départ de l'organisation objectale, c'est le manqué de l'objet. Ce manque de l'objet, il nous faut le concevoir à ses différents étages dans le sujet.



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<sup>60</sup> Own translation: L'objet est instrument à masquer, à parer, le fond fondamental de d'angoisse qui caractérise, aux différents étapes du développement du sujet, son rapport au monde.

<sup>61</sup> Own translation: L'objet enferme le sujet dans un certain cercle, un rempart, à l'intérieur duquel celui-ci se met à l'abri de ses peurs. L'objet est essentiellement lié à à l'issue d'un signal d'alarme. Il est avant tout un poste avancé contre une peur instituée. La peur donne à l'objet son rôle à un moment déterminé d'une certaine crise du sujet, qui n'en est pas pour autant typique, ni évolutive.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. as well Fink, 1997, p. 176.

<sup>63</sup> I.e. in "My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of Neuroses" (1906a).

<sup>64</sup> For an introduction to "The Family Complexes" (1938), cf. Roudinesco (2003), Miller (2005), Barzilai (1999, pp. 19-46), Lee (1990, pp. 13-17).

<sup>65</sup> Miller (2005) gives the most enlightning analysis of the concept of complex in "The Family complexes" (1938).

<sup>66</sup> This confusion between 'self' and 'other' will be an important part of our argument in the chapter on Seminar X (1962).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Lacan, 1956, p. 269. We slightly reworked this table. To stress the fact that the symbolic father is behind the three agents of lack, we put him before the three other agents. We also reordered the three forms of lack to suit our exposition.

<sup>68</sup> Own translation: Il est clair que la privation, si nous avons à nous y référer, c'est pour autant que le phallicisme, à savoir l'exigence du phallus, est, comme le dit Freud, le point majeur de tout le jeu imaginaire dans le progrès conflictuel qui est celui que décrit l'analyse du sujet. Or, ce n'est qu'à propos du réel, en tant que tout autre chose que l'imaginaire, que l'on peut parler de privation. Ce n'est pas par la que l'exigence phallique s'exerce. Il apparaît des plus problématique en effet, qu'un être présenté comme une totalité puisse se sentir privé de quelque chose que, par définition, il n'a pas. Nous dirons donc que la privation, dans sa nature de manque, est essentiellement un manque réel. C'est un trou.

<sup>69</sup> Own translation: [la frustration] est une lésion [...] un dam imaginaire. La frustration est par essence le domaine de la revendication. Elle concerne quelque chose qui est désiré sans aucune référence à aucune possibilité de satisfaction ni de d'acquisition. La frustration est par elle-même le domaine des exigences effrénées et sans loi. Le centre de la notion de frustration en tant qu'elle est une des catégories du manque, est un dam imaginaire.

<sup>70</sup> Own translation: La castration a été introduite par Freud d'une façon absolument coordonnée à la notion de la loi primordial, de ce qu'il y a de loi fondamentale dans l'interdiction de l'inceste et dans la structure de l'Œdipe [...] La castration ne peut que se classer dans la catégorie de la dette symbolique.

<sup>71</sup> Own translation: sur le plan imaginaire, il n'y a qu'une seule représentation primitive de l'état, du stade génital – le phallus en tant que tel [...] L'image érigée du phallus est là ce qui est fondamental. Il n'y en a qu'une Il n'est pas d'autre choix qu'une image virile ou la castration.

<sup>72</sup> Own translation: L'objet de la frustration [...] est belle et bien un objet réel.

<sup>73</sup> Own translation: La notion même de privation [...] implique la symbolisation de l'objet dans le réel [...] Indiquer que quelque chose n'est pas là, c'est supposer sa présence possible.

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<sup>74</sup> For a good overview of the agents of lack, cf. De Neuter (1993; 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Own translation: derrière la mère symbolique, il y a le père symbolique.

<sup>76</sup> Own translation: Les images et les fantasmes qui forment le matériel signifiant de la relation prégénitale viennent eux-mêmes d'une expérience qui s'est faite au contact du signifiant et du signifié. Le signifiant prend son matériel quelque part dans le signifié, dans un certain nombre de rapports vivants, effectivement exercés ou vécus. C'est après coup que ce passé est saisi, et que se structure cette organisation imaginaire [...] dès l'origine les objets, comme on les appelle, des différentes périodes orale et anale, sont déjà pris pour autre chose que ce qu'ils sont. Ce sont des objets qui sont déjà travaillés par le signifiant.

<sup>77</sup> Own translation: S'agissant de la privation, le manque est dans le réel, cela veut dire qu'il n'est pas dans le sujet. Pour que le sujet accède à la privation, il faut qu'il conçoive le réel comme pouvant être autre qu'il n'est, c'est à dire qu'il le symbolise déjà. La référence à la privation telle qu'elle est ici avancée consiste à poser le symbolique avant.

<sup>78</sup> Own translation: Lacan déconstruit la relation de la mère et de l'enfant, simplement en rappelant le fait de l'exigence du phallus chez la mère.

<sup>79</sup> Own translation: Certains éléments qui s'en dégagent nous montrent par exemple que l'enfant n'y accède qu'après une époque de symbolisation, mais que dans certains cas, c'est d'une façon en quelque sorte directe qu'il a abordé le dam imaginaire – non pas le sien, mais celui dans lequel la mère se trouve par rapport à la privation du phallus.

<sup>80</sup> Own translation: Est-ce ici un imaginaire qui est reflété dans le symbolique? Est-ce au contraire un élément symbolique qui apparaît dans l'imaginaire?

<sup>81</sup> On this notion of permutation, cf. Miller (1993, p. 111).

<sup>82</sup> Own translation: La notion de frustration, quand elle est mise au premier plan de la théorie analytique, se rapporte au premier âge de la vie. Elle est liée à l'investigation des traumas fixations, impressions, provenant d'expériences précœdipiennes. Cela n'implique pas qu'elle soit extérieure à l'Œdipe – elle en donne en quelque sorte le terrain préparatoire, la base et le fondement.

<sup>83</sup> Own translation: La frustration est donc considérée comme un ensemble d'impressions réelles, vécues par le sujet à une période du développement où sa relation à l'objet est centrée d'habitude sur l'*imago* dite primordiale du sein maternel, par rapport à quoi vont se former [...] ses premières fixations, celles qui ont permis de décrire les types de différents stades instinctuels. C'est de là qu'on a pu articuler les relations du stade oral et du stade anal, avec leurs subdivisions phallique, sadique etc. – et montrer qu'elles sont toutes marquées par un élément d'ambivalence, qui fait que la position du sujet participe de la position de l'autre.

<sup>84</sup> Own translation: La mère est autre chose que l'objet primitif. Elle [...] apparaît [...] à partir de ces premiers jeux, jeux de prise d'un objet [...] qu'un petit enfant de six mois fait passer par-dessus le bord de son lit pour le rattraper ensuite. Ce couplage présence-absence, articulé extrêmement précocement par l'enfant, connote la première constitution de l'agent de la frustration, qui est à l'origine la mère.

<sup>85</sup> Own translation: la présence-absence est, pour le sujet, articulée dans le registre de l'appel. L'objet maternel est proprement appelé quand il est absent – et quand il est présent, rejeté, dans le même registre que l'appel, à savoir par une vocalise.

<sup>86</sup> Own translation: Que se passe-t-il si l'agent symbolique [...] la mère [...] ne répond plus? [...] Elle déchoit. Alors qu'elle était inscrite dans la structuration symbolique qui la faisait objet présent-absent en

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fonction de l'appel – elle devient réelle.

<sup>87</sup> Own translation: Jusque-là, elle existait dans la structuration en tant qu'agent, distinct de l'objet réel qui est l'objet de satisfaction de l'enfant. Lorsqu'elle ne répond plus, lorsque, en quelque sorte, elle ne répond plus qu'à son gré, elle devient réelle, c'est à dire qu'elle devient une puissance.

<sup>88</sup> Own translation: Comment s'inscrit alors la reconnaissance de ce tiers terme imaginaire qu'est le phallus pour la mère? Bien plus, la notion que la mère manque le phallus, qu'elle est elle-même désirante [...] c'est-à-dire atteinte dans sa puissance, sera pour le sujet plus décisif que tout.

<sup>89</sup> Own translation: La privation [...] C'est spécialement le fait que la femme n'a pas de pénis, qu'elle en est privée; Ce fait, l'assomption de ce fait, a une incidence constante dans l'évolution de Presque tous les cas que Freud nous expose.

<sup>90</sup> Own translation: L'une des expériences les plus communes, c'est que d'abord [l'enfant] n'est pas seul parce qu'il y a d'autres enfants. Mais notre hypothèse de base est qu'il y est un autre terme en jeu qui est, lui, radical, constant et indépendant [...] de la présence ou de l'absence de l'autre enfant. C'est le fait que [...] la mère conserve le *Penis-neid* [...] C'est dans la relation à la mère que l'enfant éprouve le phallus comme étant le centre du désir de celle-ci.

<sup>91</sup> Own translation: Le père [...] suffit à maintenir entre les trois termes de la relation mère-enfant-phallus un écart suffisant pour que le sujet n'ait pas pour le maintenir à donner de soi, à y mettre du sien.

<sup>92</sup> In Seminar VI (1958, pp. 311-312), Lacan will elaborate the link between distance and the fetish as follows: "this notion of distance plays a decisive role, when one is simply trying to articulate, to articulate certain perverse positions, those of fetishism for example, in which the distance from an object is much more obviously manifested by the very phenomenology of fetishism. Many other forms can obviously be articulated in this sense. And the first of the truths that we would have to contribute to this is that undoubtedly this notion of distance is even so essential that after all, it may indeed perhaps be impossible to eliminate it as such from desire itself – I mean necessary for the maintenance, for the support, for the very safeguarding of the dimension of desire".

<sup>93</sup> Own translation: Il s'agit que le petit Hans trouve une suppléance à ce père qui s'obstine à ne pas vouloir le castrer.

<sup>94</sup> Own translation: L'enfant comme être réel est pris par la mère comme symbole de son manque d'objet, de son appétit imaginaire pour le phallus. L'issue normale de cette situation, c'est que l'enfant reçoive symboliquement le phallus dont il a besoin. Mais pour qu'il en ait besoin, il faut qu'il ait été préalablement menacé par l'instance castratrice, qui est originairement l'instance paternelle [...] Le père [...] introduit la relation symbolique, et avec elle la possibilité de transcender la relation de frustration ou de manque d'objet dans la relation de castration, laquelle est toute autre chose, car elle introduit ce manque d'objet dans une dialectique [...] qui confère au manque la dimension du pacte, d'une loi, d'une interdiction, celle de l'inceste en particulier.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Fink, 1997, p. 170: "Similarly, Freud's notion that the fetish object is related in the fetishist's mind to the so-called maternal phallus is not irrelevant from a Lacanian perspective, but is, rather, understandable in terms of the father, his desire, and his law. Belief in the maternal phallus suggests, as we shall see, that the mother's desire-engendering lack has not been cancelled out or named by the father, as it is in neurosis. In other words, Lacan does not consider Freud's observation irrelevant but subsumes it within a larger theoretical framework".

<sup>96</sup> Own translation: Demandons-nous ce qu'il advient si, à défaut de la relation symbolique, la relation

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imaginaire devient la règle et la mesure [...] ? [...] un accident évolutif ou une incidence historique porte atteinte aux liens de la relation mère-enfant par rapport au tiers objet, l'objet phallique, qui est à la fois ce qui manque à la femme et ce que l'enfant a découvert qui manque à la mère [...] la cohérence fait défaut. Pour la rétablir, il y a d'autres modes que symboliques. Il y a des modes imaginaires, qui sont non typiques.

<sup>97</sup> Own translation: rien n'est concevable de la phénoménologie des perversions [...] à moins à partir de l'idée que [...] Il s'agit du phallus, et de savoir comment l'enfant réalise plus ou moins consciemment que sa mère toute-puissante manqué fondamentalement de quelque chose, et c'est toujours la question de savoir par quelle voie il lui donnera cet objet dont elle manque, et dont il manque toujours lui-même.

<sup>98</sup> Own translation: C'est par exemple l'identification de l'enfant à la mère. A partir d'un déplacement imaginaire par rapport à son partenaire maternel, l'enfant fera à sa place le choix phallique, réalisera pour elle l'assomption de son *longing* vers l'objet phallique.

<sup>99</sup> In Seminars IV (1956) and V (1957), Lacan always refers in the context of fetishism to the lack in the mother, to the mother's missing phallus. In Seminar VI (1958), he will start to refer to the lack of the other in general. Cf. p. 161: "The subject refuses the castration of the other". The in French not existent term m(Other) covers the link between the mother and the Other in general.

<sup>100</sup> Own translation: le développement de l'enfant est décrit en trois temps déjà articulés de façon non linéaire puisqu'ils impliquent chaque fois l'après-coup

<sup>101</sup> Own translation: 1) Le complexe de sevrage qui implique la privation 2) Le complexe d'intrusion qui implique la frustration 3) Le complexe d'Œdipe qui implique la castration.

<sup>102</sup> Own translation: c'est à la sortie du complexe, lorsque le manque est réalisé, que le mode de manque, privation, frustration, castration entre en jeu.

<sup>103</sup> Own translation: Il en résulte un effet de tourbillon qui complique – c'est le cas de le dire – une description que l'on aurait souhaitée, pour la clarté, plus linéaire. Il s'agit en effet de conjointre dans une même opération les temps du développement avec la structure.

<sup>104</sup> Own translation: indication explicite de cette critique de l'ordre chronologique se trouve [...] lorsqu'il précise que la privation implique une symbolisation à quoi la frustration doit avoir introduit le sujet.

<sup>105</sup> Own translation: Pour que le sujet appréhende la privation, il faut d'abord qu'il symbolise le réel. Comment le sujet est-il amené à le symboliser? Comment la frustration introduit-elle l'ordre symbolique?

<sup>106</sup> Own translation: la frustration pour être complétée suppose l'introduction du tiers imaginaire.

<sup>107</sup> Own translation: le fétiche se trouve remplir [...] une fonction de protection contre l'angoisse [...] ici aussi, l'objet a une certaine fonction de complémentation par rapport à quelque chose qui se présente comme un trou, voire comme un abîme dans la réalité.

<sup>108</sup> Own translation: La fin du complexe d'Œdipe est corrélative de l'instauration de la loi comme refoulé dans l'inconscient, mais permanente.

<sup>109</sup> Own translation: Nous avons laissé l'enfant dans la position de leurre où il s'essaye auprès de sa mère [...] Le leurre dont il s'agit ici est très manifeste [...] par exemple dans ses activités séductrices à l'endroit de sa mère [...] de quoi s'agit-il en fin de compte dans l'Oedipe? Il s'agit que le sujet soit lui-même pris à ce leurre de façon telle qu'il se trouve engagé dans l'ordre existant, lequel est d'une dimension différente de celle du leurre psychologique par où il y est entré.

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<sup>110</sup> Own translation: la castration [...] est nécessaire à l'assomption du phallus maternel comme un objet symbolique. Ce n'est qu'à partir du fait que, dans l'expérience oedipienne essentielle, il est privé de l'objet par celui qui l'a [...] que l'enfant peut concevoir que ce même objet symbolique lui sera un jour donné.

<sup>111</sup> Own translation: c'est toujours la question de savoir par quelle voie il lui donnera cet objet dont elle manque, et dont il manque toujours lui-même.

<sup>112</sup> For an interesting view on Lacan's reading of the Freudian concept of disavowal, see Shepherdson (2003, pp. 123-126).

<sup>113</sup> Own translation: Est-ce ici un imaginaire qui est reflété dans le symbolique? Est-ce au contraire un élément symbolique qui apparaît dans l'imaginaire?

<sup>114</sup> Interesting in this context is the concept of the signifier-in-isolation as opposed to the signifier-in-relation (Eyers, 2012, pp.108-112).

<sup>115</sup> Own translation: réaliser un mode d'accès à cet au-delà de l'image de l'autre.

<sup>116</sup> Own translation: l'union de deux individus, où chacun est arraché à lui-même, et pour un instant plus ou moins fragile et transitoire, voire même virtuel, se trouve partie constituante de cette unité.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. as well Safouan, 2001, p. 242.

<sup>118</sup> Robertson (2015, p. 39) gives an interesting quote on the proximity of the fetishistic object and the object *a*: "Instead of situating the fetish object in the position of the central aim (or telos) of desire, he places it directly *behind* the desiring subject (Lacan 2014, 101, Lacan's italics), almost as if it functioned as a sort of blind force driving one forward, or as a vigorous gust of wind sustaining the dynamism of one's erotic movement. More specifically, he claims that the fetish object plays the necessary role of the 'cause' of desire, or a sort of libidinal precondition that, instead of standing center-stage in the subject's erotic preoccupations, allows his or her desire to 'hook on wherever it can' (Lacan 2014, 102)."

<sup>119</sup> Own translation: Que pour un court instant l'illumination fascinante de l'objet qui a été l'objet maternel satisfasse le sujet, ne suffit pas à établir un équilibre érotique d'ensemble. Et effectivement, si c'est à l'objet qu'il s'identifie pour un moment, il y perdra, si l'on peut dire, son objet primitif, à savoir la mère, et se considérera lui-même comme un objet destructeur pour elle. Ce jeu perpétuel, cette profonde diplopie, marque toute la manifestation fétichiste.

<sup>120</sup> Own translation: il semble que l'on soit en présence d'un sujet qui vous montrerait avec une excessive rapidité sa propre image dans deux miroirs opposées.

<sup>121</sup> Own translation: pour autant qu'est saisi ce symbole unique, privilégié et en même temps impermanent, qu'est l'objet précis du fétichisme, c'est à dire le quelque chose qui symbolise le phallus.

<sup>122</sup> Own translation: Au niveau du fantasme pervers, tous les éléments sont là, mais tout ce qui est signification est perdu, à savoir la relation intersubjective. Ce que l'on peut appeler les signifiants à l'état pur se maintiennent sans la relation intersubjective, vidés de leur sujet.

<sup>123</sup> Laurent (1995, pp. 31-33) gives an interesting interpretation of the Glanz auf die Nase, in which he characterizes the little boy of the case as *being* a gaze. Laurent stresses the coincidence of a partial drive (here the gaze) and the conditioning of phallic signification in fetishism.

<sup>124</sup> Own translation: Elle s'arrête en effet au bord de la robe, pas plus haut que la cheville, là où l'on

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rencontre la chaussure, et c'est bien pourquoi celle-ci peut, tout ou moins dans certains cas particuliers, mais exemplaires, prendre la fonction de substitut de ce qui n'est pas vu, mais qui est articulé, formulé, comme étant vraiment pour le sujet ce que la mère possède, à savoir le phallus, imaginaire sans doute, mais essentiel à sa fondation symbolique comme mère phallique.

<sup>125</sup> For an interesting interpretation of the concept of the veil, cf. Klein (2007, pp. 183-184).

<sup>126</sup> Own translation: Là où le phallus garde, pour Freud, une certaine positivité, il devient, chez Lacan, le manque même.

<sup>127</sup> Own translation: la structure de l'omnipotence n'est pas [...] dans le sujet, mais dans la mère, c'est à dire dans l'Autre primitif. C'est l'Autre qui est tout-puissant. Mais derrière ce tout-puissant, il y a le manque dernier auquel est suspendue sa puissance. Dès que le sujet perçoit, dans l'objet dont il attend la toute-puissance, ce manque qui le fait lui-même impuissant, le dernier ressort de la toute-puissance est reporté au-delà.

<sup>128</sup> Own translation: la confusion de la position symbolique avec la position imaginaire se produit dans chacun en un sens opposé [...] l'un s'organise par rapport à l'autre sous la forme du positif au négatif [...] il n'y a pas de meilleure illustration de la formule de Freud, que la perversion est le négatif de la névrose.

<sup>129</sup> Own translation: nous avons à faire dans la perversion à une conduite signifiante indiquant un signifiant qui est plus loin dans la chaîne signifiante, en tant qu'il lui est lié par un signifiant nécessaire.

<sup>130</sup> In our chapter on Lacan on sadism and masochism in Seminar X (1962), we will come back to the case of the young homosexual woman extensively.

<sup>131</sup> Own translation: Dora prise comme sujet se met à tous les pas sous un certain nombre de signifiants dans la chaîne. Elle trouve dans la situation une sorte de métaphore perpétuelle.

<sup>132</sup> For these lacunae, see the conclusion to our part of Freud and fetishism.

<sup>133</sup> For a classical Freudian view on Freud on masochism, cf. Brenner (1959). For a contemporary French Freudian interpretation, cf. André (2000). For more Lacanian perspectives: Dor (2001); Laurent (2007); Nobus (2000).

<sup>134</sup> For Lacan, interpreting the case of the Wolf Man as psychosis, is crucial to the development of his theory on psychosis. See Seminar III (1955), especially the first Lesson (pp. 12-23). The following quote resumes part of his elaboration: "whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real. Freud's text is free of ambiguity on this point. It concerns the Wolf Man, as you know, who gives evidence of psychotic tendencies and qualities, as is demonstrated by the brief paranoia he enters between the end of Freud's treatment and when he is taken under observation again. Well, the fact that he has rejected all means of access to castration, which is nevertheless apparent in his conduct, all access to the register of the symbolic function, the fact that any assumption of castration by an I has become impossible for him, has the closest of links with his having had a brief hallucination in childhood, of which he recounts extremely precise details" (pp. 20).

<sup>135</sup> For some decent contemporary Freudian analyses of "A Child is Being Beaten", cf. Person (2013).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Laurent, 2007, p. 222: "'A Child is Being Beaten' is a landmark in the psychoanalytic clinic of perversions since it is the article in which Freud demonstrates for the first time that perversions are not deducible from the functioning of the drive but are organized by the oedipal structure. Until then, including in the 1915 additions to 'The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', Freud had followed the great

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classifiers of the clinic of perversions". Cf. as well Dor (2001, p. 80), Nobus (2000, p. 42), Laurent (2007, p. 22).

<sup>137</sup> For an elaboration of the difference between perversion as a structure and perverse traits in neurosis, see Verhaeghe (2001).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Also "we should assign [this guilt] to the agency in the mind which sets itself up as a critical conscience over against the rest of the ego" (Freud, 1919e, p. 194).

<sup>139</sup> For an analysis of the effects of such failed Oedipus for woman, cf. Laurent (2007).

<sup>140</sup> See also: Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, pp. 371-373).

<sup>141</sup> See "On war Neuroses" (1919d).

<sup>142</sup> For a sober analysis of the three forms, see Quinodoz (2005, pp. 213-215), or Sugarman (2016, pp. 121-129).

<sup>143</sup> See however Laurent who, in his analysis of "A Child is Being Beaten", does speak of (feminine) masochism for women (2007, pp. 232-237).

<sup>144</sup> For a novel interpretation of moral masochism, pointing to its importance for Lacan, cf. Benvenuto (2003).

<sup>145</sup> On Freud's instinct to master, see Laplanche & Pontalis (1973, p. 217).

<sup>146</sup> On the link between primary aggressivity and sadism, cf. Julien (1994, p. 34): "In the mirror stage, Lacan compressed the two phases into one. At the very moment when the ego is formed by the image of the other, narcissism and aggressivity are *correlatives*. Narcissism, in which the image of one's own body is sustained by the image of the other, in fact introduces a *tension*: the other in his image both attracts and rejects me". Cf. as well: "Where Freud saw primitive destructiveness, Lacan sees all the phenomena of aggressivity – namely, jealousy, envy, dual imaginary rivalry, transitivity, and so forth". (Anonymous, What does Lacan say... about the Mirror Stage, From Primary Narcissism to Aggressivity).

<sup>147</sup> In "The Family Complexes" (1938), Lacan already linked the Fort/Da game with primary masochism (1936, p. 26): "It is worth recalling that the role masochism plays as an intimate lining to sadism was highlighted by psychoanalysis and that it was the enigma that masochism constitutes in the economy of the vital instincts that led Freud to affirm the existence of a death instinct. By following out the idea that as we have indicated above, designates the miseries of human weaning as the source of the desire for death, one will recognise in primary masochism the dialectical moment in which by his first games the subject assumes the reproduction of this misery and in that way sublimates and overcomes it. This is indeed how the primitive games of children appeared to the shrewd eye of Freud. The joy that the infant experiences in throwing an object out of his field of vision and then, when the object has been found again, in tirelessly renewing the exclusion signifies that it is indeed the pathetic nature of weaning that the subject is once again inflicting on himself. Once he was obliged to undergo it, but now he triumphs over it by actively reproducing it".

<sup>148</sup> On Hegel and Lacan, cf. Žižek (2014); Casey & Woody (1996)

<sup>149</sup> On Lacan's initial hesitation to see perversion as a clinical structure next to neurosis and psychosis, cf. Nobus (2000, p. 39): "Lacan's hesitation to qualify perversion as a discrete clinical structure permeated much of his work from the 1950s, and is rooted in the theoretical inconsistencies which troubled Freud in

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his pioneering psychoanalytic explorations of the topic”.

<sup>150</sup> Nobus claims the opposite: “In Seminar I, he posited that the structure of perversion is characterized by the reduction of the (symbolic) register of intersubjective recognition to an imaginary relationship (Lacan 1988b[1953–54]:221). By this he meant that perverts try to reduce their partners to mere objects, to instruments or idols—short of seeking solace in idealized inanimate objects—whose only function is to satisfy their own desires, with the caveat that the positions within this relationship of submission/dominance can suddenly be reversed so that the original master becomes the slave and vice versa” (2000, p. 40).

<sup>151</sup> Cf. also: “We touch there upon the question of how what one could call the mill of perversion is formed, namely, the valorization of the image. It is a question of the image in so far as it remains the privileged evidence of something which, in the unconscious, must be articulated, and put into play again in the dialectic of the transference, that is, which must again take on its full dimension in the analytic dialogue” (Lacan, 1954, p. 131).

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Chiesa (2007, p. 160): “Lacan believes he is able to show that, despite a disturbance in the Oedipal relation with the mother which hinders the emergence of the phallic Gestalt, a child can actively enter the symbolic order—as a perverse masochist—through a fantasy of fustigation. The child is in fact able to symbolize his predicament (the absence of love, and hence of frustration, due to the presence of a sibling) through an imaginary signifier (hieroglyphic) such as a stick or a whip which works as an alternative phallic signifier. In being beaten, he is loved,” says Lacan: in other words, this (phantasized) act finally institutes the child as a subject of the signifier”.

<sup>153</sup> For an interesting and original view on the second phase of Freud’s beating phantasm, cf. Laurent (2007).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Chiesa, 2007 (p. 101): “those signs / imaginary signifiers (such as the whip, the stick, etc.) [...], in “abnormal” Oedipal relations, help the child to actively enter the symbolic order in an “alternative” way (which will be marked by masochistic perversion)”.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Chiesa, 2007 (p. 106): “in its first articulated appearance, in Seminars IV and V [the phantasm] is deemed exclusively to characterize the (unconscious) psychic economy of perverse masochists, in the second phase of its elaboration, beginning with Seminar VI, Lacan is progressively obliged to assume it as a universal structure that provides the basis for the unconscious”.

<sup>156</sup> On Lacan’s search for a differentiation of perversion, psychosis and neurosis, cf. Nobus (2000, pp. 39–48).

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Miller (2013, p. 6): “The first example is the subject’s recourse to the fantasy when he is contending with the opacity of the desire of the big Other. This opacity, this illegibility, has the effect of the Freudian *Hilflosigkeit*, the subject’s distress. This is when the subject turns to the fantasy as a defence. This is said just once in the Seminar, but this one time needs to be highlighted. The subject turns to the fantasy as a defence, that is, the subject draws on the resources of the mirror-stage that offers him a range of stances, from triumph to submission, and then, so says Lacan on page 29, the subject ‘defends himself with his ego’”.

<sup>158</sup> Own translation: Lacan présente cette formule minimale [du fantasme] comme la forme vraie de la prétendue relation d’objet [...] La véritable relation d’objet qui a fait le thème du séminaire IV de Lacan, la véritable relation d’objet se trouve au niveau du fantasme. [C’est à dire que] au sens de Lacan, que la relation d’objet ne se situe pas au niveau de la pulsion.

<sup>159</sup> For an instructive overview of the object *a* in its imaginary, symbolic and real aspects, cf. among many



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others: Hoens (2016).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Evans (1996, p. 128): "In 1957, when Lacan introduces the matheme of fantasy *a* begins to be conceived as the object of desire. This is the imaginary PART OBJECT, an element which is imagined as separable from the rest of the body. Lacan now begins to distinguish between *a*, the object of desire, and the specular image, which he now symbolises *i(a)*".

<sup>161</sup> The full aphorism reads like this: "The miser deprives himself of his treasure because of his desire for it. If we can let our whole good rest with something hidden in the ground, why not with God? But when God has become as full of significance as the treasure is for the miser, we have to tell ourselves insitently that he does not exist. We must experience the fact that we love him, even if he does not exist. It is he who, schemas the operation of the dark night, withdraws himself in order not to be loved mlike the treasure is by the miser".

<sup>162</sup> On Lacan's interpretation of Weil's miser and his treasure, cf. De Kesel (2009, pp. 31-32).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Lacan (1963, p. 167-168). Cf. especially (p. 175): "I tell you that at the heart of the experience of desire lies hat remains when desire has been, let's say, satisfied, what remains at the end of desire, an end that is always a false end, an end that is always the result of having got it wrong. I spelt it out well enough for you last time, with regard to detumescence, the value that the phallus assumes in its worn-out state. This synchronic element [...] stands to remind us that essentially the object falls away from the subject in his relation to desire".

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Lacan (1963, pp. 102-103): "The objet *a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself; has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack". The object *a* stands here *for* the lacking phallus; the phallus is hence excluded from the list that Lacan lets follow after the quoted text.

<sup>165</sup> Own translation from the original edition: "La grosse voix, par exemple [...] représente l'instance d'un Autre se manifestant comme réel" (Lacan, 1958, p. 458).

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Miller (2013, p. 5): "Only at the end of the Seminar does Lacan effect a kind of change of direction by means of a sudden movement that occurs roundabout chapter XXII. In the wake of this change of direction we start to see the drive being restored to its rightful place. An object is evoked that is a real object, the object as real, and this will remain so barely accentuated that, even in his fourteenth Seminar, *La logique du fantasme*, or maybe it's in the thirteenth, *L'objet de la psychanalyse*, I haven't had time to check, Lacan was to surprise his audience by saying that the status of the object *a* is real. Its status is real and this features already, if you like, in these few lines from Seminar VI".

<sup>167</sup> Own translation: Qu'est-ce qui est important dans cet élément structurel du fantasme imaginaire qui se situe au niveau de *a*? C'est, premièrement, son caractère opaque, celui qui le spécifie sous ses formes les plus accentuées comme le pôle du désir pervers, disons en d'autres termes qu'il en était en fait l'élément structural des perversions. La perversion se caractérise en ceci que tout l'accent du fantasme est mis du côté du corrélatif proprement imaginaire. C'est à savoir, l'autre, petit *a*, ou la parenthèse (*a + b + c*, etc.), dans laquelle les objets les plus élaborés peuvent se retrouver réunis et combinés selon l'aventure, les séquelles, les résidus dans lesquels est venue se cristalliser la fonction d'un fantasme dans un désir pervers.

<sup>168</sup> See also Miller (2013, p. 10).

<sup>169</sup> This idea of the object *a* as a rest-product after a division of the subject by the signifier, will be crucial in

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the further development of the object *a* as real in Seminar X (1962), as we will see.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. a.o. Lacan (1958, pp. 298-299), where Lacan designates the primitive scene as the origin of perversion *and* of neurosis in an undifferentiated fashion; p. 309 and p. 326 where, even at the end of the Seminar, he still wrestles with the relationship between phantasm, perversion and neurosis, stating the relationship is different, but unable to say just how.

<sup>171</sup> For an interesting view on common misinterpretations of Seminar VII (1959), see for instance De Kesel (2005).

<sup>172</sup> De Kesel (2006, p. 130) puts the terms of the paradox nicely: “anyone who follows the law and nothing but the law will sooner or later be confronted with the excess of enjoyment, since that enjoyment is the secret driving force behind his scrupulous fidelity to the law. Only, it will not appear to be his enjoyment, but that of the Other. It is the enjoyment of the excessively commanding law that reverberates throughout the symbolic order. We only experience this excess in the form of the pain caused by the “obscene and ferocious” imperatives of the superego”.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, pp. 379-382).

<sup>174</sup> Cf. as well Lacan (1959, p. 202).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. De Kesel (2009, p. 88): “Here [...], we touch the core of Lacan’s thought. As a judgment apparatus, we are also and fundamentally—an “object relation” [...]. Prematurely born into a world where nothing is geared to its pleasure requirements, the judging libidinal being bonds with a fictional object and constructs for this bond an equally fictional bearer: a subject”.

<sup>176</sup> This equation of the pleasure-principle with the lateral operation of signifiers shows how problematic Lacan’s reading of the reality principle is; remember that above we noted that Lacan seemed to claim that the reality principle was a play of signifiers, while here it is the pleasure principle that is determined by signifiers.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Evans (1996, p. 208).

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Lacan (1962, a.o. p. 89).

<sup>179</sup> On the notion of extimacy, cf. Miller (2008, 2. Extimacy): “It so happens that extimacy is a term used by Lacan to designate in a problematic manner the real in the symbolic”.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. for instance also Bracher (2000, pp. 201-203), who distinguishes an imaginary Other, a symbolic Other and a real Other in Lacan.

<sup>181</sup> For a good discussion of the notion of ‘S<sub>1</sub>’, see a.o. Hook & Vanheule (2016, pp. 6-7).

<sup>182</sup> See as well Baas (1987, p. 82), who relates Kant’s idea of the transcendental schema realizing the union between the a priori and the empirical with Lacan’s idea of the phantasm realizing the union between the ‘empirical’ desire and the ‘a priori’ object *a*. See as well Žižek, in his introduction to Zupančič (2000), who seems to have read Baas’ article: “in contrast to Kant, for whom our capacity to desire is thoroughly ‘pathological’ (since, as he repeatedly stresses, there is no a priori link between an empirical object and the pleasure this object generates in the subject) , Lacan claims that there is a ‘pure faculty of desire’, since desire does have a non-pathological, a priori object-cause – this object, of course , is what Lacan calls objet petit *a*” (p. x).

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<sup>183</sup> For a detailed account of these reformulations, see Toscano (2009).

<sup>184</sup> For an indispensable source on Lacan's analysis of Kant's apologues, see Zupančič (2000). For an interesting account of Lacan's view of Kant's two apologues, see Simms (2007, pp. 92-96).

<sup>185</sup> For a brief discussion of the development of the concept of *jouissance*, cf. Evans (1996, p. 93). For a more in depth review, cf. Miller (1998, pp. 153-195).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Stavarakakis (2002, pp. 42-43).

<sup>187</sup> It is this strand of thought that Lacan will develop in Seminar X (1962). Where the Thing in Seminar VII (1959) is absolute, in Seminar X it becomes fragmented into different objects *a* (cf. Miller, 1998, pp. 153-195).

<sup>188</sup> Cf. also Miller (1998 p. 187), who equalizes the Thing with the "Other of the Other": "What is the Thing [...] As a term, it is the Other of the Other" (Own translation: Original: "qu'est-ce que la Chose, [...] Comme terme, c'est l'Autre de l'autre". In other words, *jouissance* is to be found where the Other is lacking, where there is lack in the Other. The articulation of *jouissance* with the Other is another strand of thought that will be developed in Seminar X (1962).

<sup>189</sup> The original reads: "De quoi s'agit-il? Que j'attente aux droits de l'autre en tant qu'il est mon semblable dans l'énoncé de la règle universelle, ou s'agit-il en soi du faux témoignage?" (Lacan, 1960, p. 223).

<sup>190</sup> For an interesting "analysis of this quote, cf. De Kesel (2009, pp. 158-160). Cf. also Zupančič (2000), who does not read this quote as pertaining to Lacan himself.

<sup>191</sup> For those who read Seminar VII (1959) as prescribing such an ethic of *jouissance*, read De Kesel's "There is no Ethics of the Real" (2005).

<sup>192</sup> On the "System of Pius VI", see a.o. Klossowski (1992, p. 89-90); Nobus (unpublished).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Miller (1998, p. 163): "How does *jouissance* appear in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*? It always appears in its absolute massivity [...] that demands a transgression, a forcing, in an abyssal place, one could say, and to which one only has access by transgression. In the Seminar of the *Four Concepts*, not at all. We don't have at all a massive *jouissance* that presents itself, we have a fragmented *jouissance*, as object little *a*". Own translation: Comment la *jouissance* apparaît-elle dans *l'Éthique de la psychanalyse*? Elle apparaît toujours dans sa massivité absolue [...] qui demande une transgression, un forçage, dans un lieu, on peut dire, abyssal et auquel on n'a accès que par transgression. Dans le séminaire des *Quatre concepts*, pas du tout. On n'a pas du tout une *jouissance* massive qui se présente, on a une *jouissance* fragmentée, en objet petit *a*.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Miller (1998, p. 160): "[In Seminar VII] *jouissance* passes into the real". Own translation: [Dans le séminaire VII] la *jouissance* passe au réel.

<sup>195</sup> For interesting interpretations of "Kant with Sade", we refer to, among others: Miller (1996), Nobus (Unpublished), Fink (2014), Baas (1989), Žižek (1998) and Robertson (2015). For an excellent, albeit alas incomplete paraphrase, see Anonymous (1970). A more recent paraphrase can be found in Hughes (2009).

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Miller (1996, p. 212): "Jacques Lacan's 'Kant with Sade' is probably one of the most difficult texts in the *Écrits*". Clark (1988, p.187), in his annotated bibliography of Lacan, characterizes it as an "extremely difficult essay".

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<sup>197</sup> For an account of the editorial history of Kant with Sade (1966), see Toscano (2009, pp. 83-87). For a list of the different editions and English translations, see Nobus (n. d., p. 11).

<sup>198</sup> Some authors do not see the breast and the feces as objects *a*. Cf. Vanheule, 2011, p. 133: "It is frequently argued in Lacanian literature that the nipple/breast and the scybalum/excrement are the oral and anal objects *a*, respectively. In my interpretation this is wrong, as these are the partial objects to which the subject of jouissance relates. Building on Lacan's earlier work (Lacan, 1957-8, 1958-9) and comments from the 1960s (Lacan, 1960, 1962-3, 1964; Stasse, 2008), I suggest that in the oral register the object *a* can be found in the dimension of nothingness around which each act of taking-in is gravitating, whereas in the anal register the object *a* takes the shape of giving nothing".

<sup>199</sup> For a more detailed argumentation, cf. Simms (2007, pp. 11-13).

<sup>200</sup> Sade's maxim in Juliette is the following: "Pray avail me of that part of your body which is capable of giving me a moment's satisfaction, and, if you are so inclined, amuse yourself with whatever part of mine may be agreeable to you" (1797, pp. 63-64).

<sup>201</sup> Hughes remarks the same (2009, p. 62).

<sup>202</sup> Own translation: J'ai le droit de jouir de ton corps, dirai-je à qui me plaît, et ce droit, je l'exercerai, sans qu'aucune limite m'arrête dans le caprice des exactions que j'aie le goût d'y assouvir.

<sup>203</sup> Own translation: J'ai le droit de jouir de ton corps, peut me dire quiconque, et ce droit, je l'exercerai, sans qu'aucune limite m'arrête dans le caprice des exactions que j'aie le goût d'y assouvir.

<sup>204</sup> In the stress he puts on the non-reciprocity of the sadist and masochist positions, Lacan can be seen as foreshadowing Deleuze in "Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty" (1991). Deleuze analyses masochism in contradistinction to sadism, concluding that the two forms of 'pornology' are non-communicating, and cannot be integrated into sadomasochistic entity. He argues that masochism is something far more subtle and complex than the enjoyment of pain and that masochism has nothing to do with sadism.

<sup>205</sup> Own translation: l'impératif moral n'en fait pas moins, puisque c'est de l'Autre que son commandement nous requiert. Fink mistranslated this as "the moral imperative does no less, since its commandment requisitions us as Other" (Lacan, 1966, p. 650). In a note, however, Fink gives an alternative, more correct translation: "C'est de l'Autre que son commandement nous requiert (its commandment requisitions us as Other) could also be understood as 'it is from the Other that its commandment requisitions us.'" (Lacan, 1966, p. 831). Cf. on this issue of translation: Nobus (unpublished, p. 48).

<sup>206</sup> Hughes (2009, p. 60) comments on this Kantian paradox as follows: "There is a paradox in Kant, which occurs because the subject has no object, at the very moment, when he encounters the law. However there is an intrinsic object of which Kant is not aware and that is the *o* object, in the guise of the voice from within, which he indicates is that of conscience. This inner voice proposes an order which is that of pure practical reason, which is also known as will".

<sup>207</sup> Hughes rephrases it thus: "We must acknowledge this aspect [i.e. that it is universally acceptable from a moral standpoint] of the maxim because its very utterance causes two things to occur. Firstly, it, like Kant, rejects "the pathological, of every consideration of a good, of a passion, even of compassion" which is how Kant freed up the moral law; secondly, the form of Sade's law is similar to Kant's in so far as it has a similar form "which is also its only substance" because the will is tied to the law as it allows only for a reason which is contained within the maxim itself".

<sup>208</sup> The English translation puts the phrase 'anyone can say to me' between inverted comma's. To suit the

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French original, we omit them here. Remark as well that ‘anyone can say to me’ is not to be found in the maxim in the Critique version of “Kant with Sade” (1963). It is an addition Lacan inserted when publishing the text in *Ecrits* (1966). The fact that Lacan added it in a later edition vows for the importance it takes in his thinking.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Anonymous: “In some sense, there can only be desire if *jouissance* has drilled a hole in the Other. It is from this hole that the ‘Che voi?’ can sustain itself. We should compare ‘Tu es’ to ‘Che voi’ as two sides of the same coin” (Notes on ‘Kant with Sade’, 2011, p. 251).

<sup>210</sup> Hughes interprets the two poles as follows: “*Jouissance*, by virtue of its structure, is bipolar. Its first pole is found in the perpetrator of cruelty and the other pole is found in the hole produced in the Other (victim) in order to ‘erect the cross of Sadean experience in it’” (2009, p. 67).

<sup>211</sup> Own translation: Dans cet impératif le ‘je’ qui énonce son droit à la jouissance n’est pas le ‘me’ qui énonce l’impératif, de sorte que cet impératif sadien implique et manifeste la division subjective comme division du sujet de l’énoncé et du sujet de l’énonciation.

<sup>212</sup> Note that the fact that the text states ‘other’ instead of the more correct ‘Other’ is probably due to the fact that it concerns here a transcription of the speech Miller gave, not a text that was edited by Miller himself. We take the freedom here to read it simply as ‘Other’.

<sup>213</sup> In the *Ecrits* it reads: “un énoncé excluant comme telle la réciprocité (la réciprocité et non la charge de revanche)” (Lacan, 1966, French edition, p. 770). Fink translates it as follows: “a statement that as such excludes reciprocity (reciprocity and not “my turn next time”). (Lacan, 1966, p. 659). He adds the following explanation in a note: “*La charge de revanche* (“my turn next time”) is an idiomatic expression used, for example, when someone treats you to a meal and you say it will be your treat next time” (Lacan, 1966, p. 831).

<sup>214</sup> This makes one also think of Lacan’s attempt to characterize the object *a* as ‘the split’ or the slit [la fente] in his analysis of voyeurism and exhibitionism in Seminar VI (1958); see our section about Lacan on sadism and masochism before Seminar VII (1959).

<sup>215</sup> For a study of the influence of early Reformation on Lacan, cf. Westerlink (2012).

<sup>216</sup> Nobus for instance interprets it simply and conveniently as the “sadistic phantasm of Sade’s libertines”, without inferring anything for a more generic theory of perversion (unpublished, p. 70).

<sup>217</sup> Apart from standing for ‘desire for’, the lozenge has quite some other functions and meanings in Lacan’s work: the place where the signifier intervenes to permanently alter the status of the subject (Lacan, 1957, p. 407); the relations envelopment-development-conjunction-disjunction, (Lacan, 1966, p. 542); the place of the subject’s fading in and fading before the object *a* (Lacan, 1966, p. 542, note 17); a cut on the surface, able to detach the two heterogeneous elements in the form of the ‘\$’ and the ‘a’ from the surface, following which the ‘\$’ props up or covers the field of reality and the ‘a’ corresponds to the fields of the imaginary and the symbolic (Lacan, 1966, p. 487, note 14). In his Seminar on Identification (Lacan, 1962, p. 267 a. f.), the punch, the vertical cut in the symbol along which ‘>’ and ‘<’ are joined, with an aim to explain how a signifier in its most radical essence could be envisaged simply as a cut in the surface. In Seminar XI (1964), Lacan ‘decomposes’ the lozenge in a lower and an upper half, standing for alienation and separation respectively (Lacan, 1964, pp. 209-215). We will come back to this in our analysis of the two-dimensional schema. For a detailed analysis of the lozenge in Lacan’s work, see Biswas (2011).

<sup>218</sup> We will explain the left-hand and right-hand positions in our analysis of the two-dimensional schema as respectively the positions of the subject and the Other.

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<sup>219</sup> Remark that in the Sadean maxim, the executioner, as will become clear later, can also be seen as a subject that receives orders — orders from the ‘voice of nature’, from the Other, from the herald of the law. Both readings are possible; it depends on one’s focus: the executioner as subject or the victim as subject.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. List of algebraic symbols (n. d.).

<sup>221</sup> Own translation: The French reads: “le caprice des exactions que j’aie le goût d’y assouvir”.

<sup>222</sup> On the indestructible victim, cf. also what we wrote under the heading “The indestructible victim in ourselves” in the previous section, De Kesel (2009, p. 234), and Fukuda (2011, p. 28).

<sup>223</sup> Own translation: Il y a donc, si vous voulez, une affinité structurale entre la perversion et la psychanalyse [...] dans ce souci d’obtenir un sujet barré, de faire sortir la division du sujet du côté de l’analysant, d’obtenir \$ à partir du sujet qui arrive comme pathologique. Dans “Kant avec Sade”, Lacan évoque justement ce sujet de départ, ce sujet qui est le sujet sensible et dont le bourreau va essayer de faire sortir la division jusqu’à son évanouissement. Justine, c’est une patiente. Elle pâtit de ce qu’on lui fait. Le terme même de patient qu’on emploie dans l’analyse, désigne le S du schéma sadien, c’est-à-dire le sujet comme pathologique. Il importe de façon tout à fait essentielle de distinguer le patient du sujet proprement dit.

<sup>224</sup> Sade’s version is actually a bit different, and only to be found in Juliette (1797), and not, as Lacan claims, in multiple places in Sade’s work: “More screams from me only animate this scoundrel who next inserts his fingers into my vagina; they come out bringing with them the skin he has scraped from the walls of that delicate part. ‘Lubin,’ he then murmured to his valet, exhibiting his bloody fingers, ‘my dear Lubin, I triumph. Cunt-skin’.

<sup>225</sup> Miller (1996, p. 236): “Thanks to Sade, who renders the split in the subject explicit, we can complement our S with \$. With Sade we see an explicit splitting of the subject. We are also going to complement the V — which, as I said before, designates the voice of conscience, and which Lacan takes as the will [*Volonté*], the pure will in Kant’s work — with the symbol of the voice as object *a*. This abstract will is nothing without the voice which props it up and which is the remainder when all objects have disappeared”.

<sup>226</sup> For, very tentative, interpretations, see for instance: Fink (2014, pp. 123-128), Robertson (2015, pp. 61-68). For a concise interpretation that stays close to Lacan’s text, see André (1992, pp. 25-27).

<sup>227</sup> Own translation: Rendre *a* à celui de qui il provient, le grand Autre, est l’essence de la perversion.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Robertson, B. (2015), Harari, R. (2001, pp. x-xii).

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Shepherdson in his foreword to Harari’s “Lacan’s Seminar on Anxiety” (2001, p. xxviii).

<sup>230</sup> Own translation:  $\mathcal{A}$ , [...] c’est l’Autre du discours, [...] un qui parle en tant qu’il est barré, c’est à dire qu’on ne sait pas ce qu’il veut.

<sup>231</sup> Own translation: nous pouvons être cet objet affecté de désir.

<sup>232</sup> Miller calls it “une division de l’Autre par l’interrogation du sujet”, a division of the Other by the interrogation of the subject (2003, Lesson 5, p. 2).

<sup>233</sup> On the ‘S’ in Seminar X (1962), cf. as well Harari (2001, p. 99).

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Miller: “A division in which one takes as the first result the ciphering of the subject, its grip in the

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repetition of One, and one isolates, inscribes, in a supplementary fashion, the remainder with the famous small letter *a*. This remainder is isolated so that the Other is not simply the One. If the field of the Other were only made of Ones, it would be reducible, it would only be the ensemble of these Ones. What directs the reading of the Seminar is not forgetting that the Other is Other because there is a remainder" (2005, p. 13).

<sup>235</sup> Own translation: Entre le sujet si l'on peut dire 'autrifié' et l'Autre barré, surgit le *a*, 'la livre de chair'.

<sup>236</sup> For interesting overviews of Lacan on the mirror-stage, cf. Muller (1985; 2007), Vanheule (2011a).

<sup>237</sup> Own translation: Là où quelque chose manque dans l'Autre, le pervers place un objet-plus-de-jourir'. We took the liberty to translate the 'objet-plus-de-jourir', a term of the later Lacan, as object *a*.

<sup>238</sup> For an excellent explanation of Spinoza's idea of the immanent cause, see: Kordela (2007, pp. 27-32).

<sup>239</sup> For an interesting account of the link between the object *a* and the body, cf. Vanheule (2011b, pp. 132-133), who differentiates between the partial objects and the objects *a*.

<sup>240</sup> Miller gives an interesting account of these schemas (2003, Lesson 18, pp. 7-8).

<sup>241</sup> We wrote here '\$' instead of 'S'. The official translation, Miller's original edition and the typescript of the Seminar all give 'S', but this is certainly wrong: as seen in the second schema, it must be '\$'. Gallagher's 'pirate' translation gives also '\$'.

<sup>242</sup> For a substantial account of the homosexual young woman, see Lacan (1956).

<sup>243</sup> As said, while Lacan focuses here exclusively on the phallic aspect of the completion of the Other, he will abandon this approach almost entirely and will stop focusing on -  $\phi$  and  $\Phi$  and generalize what the Other lacks as the object *a*

<sup>244</sup> On the side of the Other and the side of the Subject and the implications on the structure of the subject in perversion, see the paragraph "Two sides of the schema" in our part on "Kant with Sade" (1966).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. as well Robertson (2015, p. 46).

<sup>246</sup> For interesting speculations on the notion of the black fetish, cf. Nobus (unpublished, p. 63) and Robertson (2015, pp. 47-48).

<sup>247</sup> Cf. also Fink: "The superego, as the internalization of the criticism we receive from our parents, is a repository not merely of the moral principles our parents hand down to us, but also of the kind of harshness we sense in their voice while they lecture, scold, and punish us" (1996, p. 188).

<sup>248</sup> For interesting further speculations on the object voice, see Dolar (1966) and Miller (1989; 2007).

<sup>249</sup> Own translation: Le concept de scène, alors qui est une scène imaginaire mais qui est aussi bien la scène de l'Autre puisque par rapport au réel l'imaginaire et le symbolique sont du même côté, le concept de scène est ici essentiel.

<sup>250</sup> Here, Price's official English translation is very imprecise. Own translation: Dans ces structures se dénonce le lien radical de l'angoisse à l'objet en tant qu'il choisit. Sa fonction essentielle est d'être le reste du sujet, reste comme réel (Lacan, 1962, p. 194).